This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HN 1BRT M

Digitized by Google

KD 686

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

KD 686

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNTIL DEATH US DO PART.

Digitized by Google

POPULAR NOVELS.

BY

AUGUSTA EVANS WILSON.

1. BEULAH . .	$1.75	4. ST. ELMO. .	$2.00
2. MACARIA. .	1.75	5. VASHTI. . .	2.00
3. INEZ. . . .	1.75	6. INFELICE. .	2.00

"Who has not read with rare delight the novels of Augusta Evans? Her strange, wonderful, and fascinating style; the profound depths to which she sinks the probe into human nature, touching its most sacred chords and springs; the intense interest thrown around her characters, and the very marked peculiarities of her principal figures, conspire to give an unusual interest to the works of this eminent Southern authoress."

All published uniform with this volume, and sent *free* by mail, on receipt of price, by

G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,

New York.

Digitized by Google

VASHTI;

OR,

"UNTIL DEATH US DO PART."

A Novel.

BY

AUGUSTA J. EVANS,

AUTHOR OF

"RUTH," "MACARIA," "ST. ELMO," ETC.

"But I have not grown easy in these bonds,—
But I have not denied what bonds these were."

NEW YORK:
Carleton, Publisher, Madison Square.
LONDON: S. LOW, SON & CO.,
M DCCC LXXIX

Digitized by Google

KD 486

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
SHELDON FUND
JULY 10, 1940

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1869, by
GEORGE W. CARLETON,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York.

TROW'S
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING CO.,
205-213 *East 12th St.*,
NEW YORK.

Digitized by Google

TO THE HONORED MEMORY OF

My Beloved Father,

WHOSE DEATH HAS RETARDED THE COMPLETION OF A WORK
WHICH, IN THE BEGINNING, WAS BLESSED
WITH HIS APPROVAL,

I REVERENTLY DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

"Every man has his own style, as he has his own nose; and it is neither polite nor Christian to rally an honest man about his nose, however singular it may be. How can I help it that my style is not different? That there is no affectation in it, I am very certain."

Lessing.

"Yea, I take myself to witness,
That I have loved no darkness,
Sophisticated no truth,
Nursed no delusion,
Allowed no fear."

Matthew Arnold.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNTIL DEATH US DO PART.

CHAPTER I.

"I CAN hear the sullen, savage roar of the breakers, if I do not see them, and my pretty painted bark — expectation — is bearing down helplessly upon them. Perhaps the unwelcome will not come to-day. What then? I presume I should not care; and yet, I am curious to see him, — anxious to know what sort of person will henceforth rule the house, and go in and out here as master. Of course the pleasant, peaceful days are at an end, for men always make din and strife in a household, — at least my father did, and he is the only one I know much about. But, after all, why borrow trouble? — the interloper may never come."

The girl stood on tiptoe, shading her eyes with one hand, and peering eagerly down the winding road which stretched at right angles to the avenue, and over the hills, on towards the neighboring town. No moving speck was visible; and, with a sigh of relief, she sank back on the grassy mound and resumed the perusal of her book. Above and around her spread the wide branches of an aged apple-tree, feathered thickly with pearly petals, which the wind tossed hither and thither and drifted over the bermuda, as restless tides strew pink-chambered shells on sloping strands; and down through the flowery limbs streamed the waning March sun, throwing grotesque shadows on the sward and golden ripples over the face and figure of the young lounger. A few yards distant a row of whitewashed bee-hives extended along the western side of the garden-wall, where perched a peacock whose rainbow hues were burnished by the

Digitized by Google

slanting rays that smote like flame the narrow pane of glass which constituted a window in each hive and permitted investigation of the tireless workers within. The afternoon was almost spent; the air, losing its balmy noon breath, grew chill with the approach of dew, and the figure under the apple-tree shivered slightly, and, closing her book, drew her scarlet shawl around her shoulders and leaned her dimpled chin on her knee.

Sixteen years had ripened and rounded the girlish form, and given to her countenance that indefinable charm which marks the timid hovering between careless, frolicsome youth, and calmly conscious womanhood; while perfect health rouged the polished cheeks and vermilioned the thin lips, whose outlines sharply indexed more of decision than amiability of character.

There were hints of brown in the heavy mass of waveless dusky hair, that was elaborately braided and coiled around the well turned head, and certain amber rays suggestive of topaz and gold flashed out now and then in the dark-hazel iris of the large eyes, lending them an eldritch and baleful glow. Fresh as the overhanging apple-blooms, but immobile as if carved from pearl, — perhaps it was just such a face as hers that fronted Jason, amid the clustering boughs of Colchian rhododendrons, when first he sought old Æëtes' prescient daughter, — the maiden face of magical Medea, innocent as yet of murder, sacrilege, fratricide, and plunder, — eloquent of all possibilities of purity and peace, but vaguely adumbrating all conceivable disquietude and guilt.

The hushed expectancy of the fair young countenance had given place to a dreamy languor, and the dark lashes drooped heavily, when a long shadow fell upon the grass, and simultaneously the peacock sounded its shrill alarum. Rising quickly, the girl found herself face to face with one upon whose features she had never looked before, and for a moment each eyed the other searchingly. The stranger raised his hat, and inclining his head slightly, said, —

"I'permit me to ask your name?"

"Salome Owen. And yours, sir, is —"

"Ulpian Grey."

Digitized by Google

For a few seconds neither spoke; but the man smiled, and the girl bit her under-lip and frowned.

"Are you the miller's daughter?"

"I am the miller's daughter; and you are the master of Grassmere."

"It seems that I come home like Rip Van Winkle, or Ulysses, unknown, unwelcomed, — unlike the latter, — even by a dog."

"Where is your sister?"

"Not having seen her for five years, I am unable to answer."

"She went to town two hours ago, to meet you."

"Then, after all, I am expected; but pray by what route — balloon or telegraph?"

"Miss Jane went to the railroad dépot, but thought it possible you might not arrive to-day, and said she would attend a meeting at the church, if you failed to come. I presume she missed you in the crowd. Sir, will you walk into the house?"

Perhaps he did not hear the question, and certainly he did not heed it, amid the clamorous recollections that rushed upon him as he gazed earnestly over the lawn, down the avenue, and up at the ivy-mantled front of the old brick homestead. Thinking it might impress him as ludicrous or officious that she should invite him to enter and take possession of his own establishment, Salome reddened and compressed her lips. Apparently forgetful of her presence, he stood with his hat in his hand, noting the changes that time had wrought: the growth of venerable trees and favorite shrubs, the crumbling of fences, the gathering moss on the sun-dial, and the lichen stains upon two marble vases that held scarlet verbena on either side of the broad stone steps.

His close-fitting travelling suit of gray showed the muscular, well-developed form of a man of medium size, whose very erect carriage enhanced his height and invested him with a commanding air; while the unusual breadth of his chest and shoulders seemed to indicate that life had called him to athletic out-door pursuits, rather than the dun and dusty atmosphere of a sedentary, cloistered career.

Digitized by Google

There are subtle countenances that baffle the dainty stipple and line tracery of time, refusing to become mere tablets, mere fleshy intaglios of the past, whereon every curious stranger may spell out the bygone, and, counting their footprints, cast up the number of engraving years. Thus it happened that if Salome had not known from the family Bible that this man was almost thirty-five, her eager scrutiny of his features would have discovered little concerning his age, and still less concerning his character. Exposure to the winds and heat of tropic regions had darkened and sallowed the complexion, which his clear deep blue eyes and light brown hair declared was originally of Saxon fairness; in proof whereof, when he drew off one glove and lifted his hand it seemed as if the marble fingers of one statue were laid against the bronze cheek of another.

Looking intently at this grave yet benignant countenance, full of serenity, because calmly conscious of its power, the girl set her teeth and ground her heel into the velvet turf, for *frangas non flectes* was written on his smooth, broad brow, and she felt fiercely rebellious as some fiery, free creature of the Kamse, when first confronted with the bit and trappings of him who will henceforth bridle and tame the desert-bred.

Waking from his brief reverie, the stranger turned and extended his hand, saying, in tones as low and sweet as a woman's, —

"Will you not welcome a wanderer back to his home?"

She gave him the tips of her fingers, but the "Imp of the Perverse" dictated her answer, —

"As you saw fit to compare yourself, a few moments since, to certain celebrated absentees, I am constrained to tell you that I happen to be neither Penelope nor Gretchen, nor yet the illustrious dog referred to."

He smiled good-humoredly, and replied, —

"I am not very sure that there is not a spice of Dame Van Winkle somewhere in your nature. True, we are strangers, but I believe you are my sister's adopted child, and I hope you are glad to see her brother at home once more. Jane is a dear kind

Digitized by Google

link, who should make us at least good friends; for, if you are attached to her you will in time learn to like me."

"I doubt it,—seeing that you resemble Miss Jane about as nearly as I do the Grand Lama of Larissa, or the idol Bhadrinath. But, sir, although it is not my office to welcome you, I presume you have not forgotten the front door, and once more I ask, Will you walk in and make yourself at home in your own house?"

As she led the way to the steps, the arched gate at the end of the avenue swung open, a carriage entered, and Salome retreated to her own room, leaving unwitnessed the happy meeting between an aged, infirm sister, and long-absent brother.

Locking the door to secure herself from intrusion, she drew a low rocking-chair to the hearth, where smouldered the embers of a dying fire, and dropping her face in her palms, stared abstractedly at the ashes. As she swayed slowly to and fro, her lips parted and closed, her brows bent from their customary curves of beauty, and half inaudibly she muttered,—

"The sceptre is departing from Judah. My rule is well nigh ended; the interregnum has been brief, and the old dynasty reigns once more. Just what I dreaded from the hour I heard he was coming home. I shall be reduced to a mere cipher, and made to realize my utter dependence,—and the iron will soon enter my soul. We paupers are adepts in the art of reading the countenance, and I have looked at this Ulpian Grey long enough to know that I might as well bombard Gibraltar with boiled peas as hope to conquer one of his whims or alter one of his purposes. There will be bitterness and strife between us. I shall wish him in his grave a thousand times before it closes over him,—and he, unless he is too good, will hate me cordially. I cannot and will not give up all my hopes and expectations, without a long, fierce struggle."

Salome Owen was the eldest of five children, who, by the death of both parents, had been thrown penniless upon the world, and found a temporary asylum in the county poor-house. Her mother she remembered merely as a feeble, fractious invalid; and her father, who had long been employed as super-

Digitized by Google

intendent of large mills belonging to Miss Jane Grey, had, after years of reckless intemperance, ended his wretched career in a fit of mania a potu. His death occurred at a season when Miss Grey was confined to her bed by an attack of rheumatism, which rendered her a cripple for the remainder of her days; but the first hours of her convalescence were spent in devising plans for the education and maintenance of his helpless orphans. In the dusty, cheerless yard of the poor-house she had found the little group huddled under a mulberry-tree one hot July noon; and, sending the two younger children to the orphan asylum in a neighboring town, she had apprenticed one boy to a worthy carpenter, another to an eminent horticulturist in a distant State; and Salome, the handsomest and brightest of the flock, she carried to her own home as an adopted child. Here, for four years, the girl had lived in peace and luxurious ease, surrounded by all the elegances and refining associations which though not inherent in are at the command of wealth; and so rapidly and gracefully had she fitted herself into the new social niche, that the dark and stormy morning of her life had become only a dim and hideous recollection, that rarely lifted its hated visage above the smooth and shining surface of the happy present.

Fortuitous circumstances constitute the moulds that shape the majority of human lives, and the hasty impress of an accident is too often regarded as the relentless decree of all-ordaining fate; while to the philosophic anthropologist it might furnish matter for curious speculation whether, if Attila and Alaric had chanced to find themselves the pampered sons of some merchant prince, — some Rothschild or Peabody of the fifth century, — their campaigns had not been purely fiscal and bloodless, limited to the leaves of a ledger, while the names of Goth and Hun had never crystallized into synonyms of havoc and ruin; or had Timour been trained to cabbage-raising and vine-dressing, whether he would not have lived in history as the great horticulturist of Kesth, or the Diocletian of Samarcand, rather than the Tartar tyrant and conqueror of the East? How many possible Howards have swung at Tyburn? How

Digitized by Google

many canonized and haloed heads have barely escaped the doom of Brinvilliers, and the tender mercies of Carnifex?

Analogous to that wonderful Gulf Stream, once a myth and still a mystery, the strange current of human existence, fourscore and ten years long, bears each and all of us with a strong, steady sweep away from the tropic lands of sunny childhood, enamelled with verdure and gaudy with bloom, through the temperate regions of manhood and womanhood, fruitful and harvest-hued, on to the frigid, lonely shores of dreary old age, snow-crowned and ice-veined; and individual destinies seem to resemble the tangled drift on those broad bounding gulf-billows, driven hither and thither, strewn on barren beaches, scattered over bleaching coral crags, stranded upon blue bergs, — precious germs from all climes and classes; some to be scorched under equatorial heats; some to perish by polar perils; a few to take root and flourish and triumph, building imperishable landmarks; and many to stagnate in the long, inglorious rest of a Sargasso Sea.

For all helpless human waifs in this surging ocean of time, there is comfort in the knowledge that the fiercest storms toss their drift highest; and one of these apparently savage waves of adversity had swept Salome Owen safely to an isle of palms and peace, where, under the fostering rays of prosperity, the selfish and sordid elements of her character found rapid development.

In affectionate natures, family ties serve as cords to strangle selfishness; for, in large domestic circles, each member contributes a moiety to swell the good of the whole — silently endures some trial, makes some sacrifice, shares some sympathy and sunshine, hoards some grief and gloom; and had Salome remained with her brothers and sisters, their continual claims on her time and attention would have healthfully diverted thoughts that had long centred solely in self. Finding that fortune had temporarily sheathed in velvet the goad of necessity, the girl's aspirations soared no higher than the maintenance of her present easy and luxurious position, as a petted dependent on the affection and bounty of a weak but generous and lonely old lady. Having no other object near, upon which to lavish

Digitized by Google

the love and caresses that were stored in her heart, Miss Jane had turned fondly to Salome, and so earnestly endeavored to brighten her life, that the latter felt assured she was selected as the heiress of that house and estate where she had dwelt so happily; and thus sanguine concerning her future prospects, the strong will of the girl completely dominated the feebler and failing one of her benefactress, through whose fingers the reins of government slipped so gradually, that she was unconscious of her virtual abdication.

From this pleasant dream of a handsome heritage and life-long plenty, Salome had been rudely aroused by the unwelcome tidings that a young half-brother of Miss Jane was coming to reside under her roof; and prophetic fear whispered that the stranger would contest and divide her dominion. A surgeon in the United States navy, he had been absent for five years in distant seas, and only resigned his commission in consequence of letters which informed him of the feeble condition of his only surviving relative. Those who have eaten the bread of charity learn to interpret countenances with an unerring facility that eclipses the vaunted skill of Lavater, and the girl's brief inspection of the face which would henceforth confront her daily, yielded little to dispel her gloomy forebodings. The sound of the tea-bell terminated her reverie, and rising, she walked slowly to the dining-room, throwing her head as erect as possible, and compressing her mouth like some gladiator summoned to the fatal arena of the Coliseum.

The dining-room was large and airy, with lofty wide windows, and neatly papered walls, where in numerous old-fashioned and quaintly carved frames hung the ancestral portraits of the family. Although one window was open, and the mild air laden with the perfumed breath of spring, a bright wood fire flashed on the hearth, near which Miss Jane sat in her large, cushioned rocking-chair, resting her swollen slippered feet on a velvet stool, while her silver-mounted crutches leaned against the arm of her chair. An ugly and very diminutive brown terrier snarled and frisked on the rug, tormenting a staid and aged black cat, who occasionally arched her back and showed

Digitized by Google

her teeth; and Dr. Grey stood leaning over his sister's chair, smoothing the soft grizzled locks that clustered under the rich lace border of her cap. He was talking of other days, — those of his boyhood, when, kneeling by that hearth, she had pasted his kites, found strings for his tops, made bags for his marbles, or bound up his bleeding hands, bruised in boyish sports; and, while he read from the fresher page of his memory the blessed juvenile annals long since effaced from hers, a happy smile lighted her withered face, and she put up one thin hand to pat the brown and bearded cheek which nearly touched her head. To the pretty young thing who had paused on the threshold, watching what passed, it seemed a peaceful picture, cosy and complete, needing no adjuncts, defying intruders; but Miss Jane caught a glimpse of the shrinking figure, and beckoned her to the fire-place.

"Salome, come shake hands with my sailor-boy, and tell him how glad we are to have his sunburnt face once more among us. Ulpian, this is my dear child Salome, who makes noise and sunshine enough in an otherwise dark and silent dreary house. Why, children, don't stand bowing at each other, like foreign ministers at court! Ulpian, you are to be a brother to that child; so go and kiss her like a Christian, and let us have no more state and ceremony."

"*Sans cérémonie* we introduced ourselves this afternoon, under the apple-tree, and I presume Salome will accept the assurance of my friendly intentions and fraternal regard, and decline the seal which only long acquaintance and perfect confidence could induce her to permit. Notwithstanding the very evident fact that she is not entirely overwhelmed with delight at my return, I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to one who has so largely contributed to my sister's happiness, and shall avail myself of every opportunity to prove my appreciation of her devotion."

Dr. Grey stepped forward, took Salome's hand, and touched it lightly with his lips, while the grave dignity of his manner forbade the thought that affectation of gallantry or idle persiflage suggested the words or action.

Digitized by Google

Disarmed by the quiet courtesy which she felt she had not merited, the girl's ready wit and nimbly obedient tongue for once proved treacherous; and, conscious that the flush was deepening on cheek and brow, she moved to the oval table in the centre of the floor, and seated herself behind the massive silver urn.

"Ulpian, take your place yonder, at the foot, and excuse my absence from the table this first evening of your return. I always have my meals here, close to the fire, and Salome presides in my place. Child, put no cream in his tea, but a bountiful share of sugar. You see, my boy, I have not grown too old to recollect your whims."

As he obeyed her, Salome was preparing to pour out the tea; but, catching his eye, she paused, and Dr. Grey bowed his head on his hand, and solemnly and impressively asked a blessing, and offered up fervent thanks for the family reunion. In the somewhat fragmentary discourse that ensued between brother and sister the orphan took no part; and, a half hour later, when the little party removed to the library and established themselves comfortably for the evening, Salome drew her chair close to the lamp, and, under pretence of examining a book of engravings, covertly studied the features and mien of the new-comer.

His quiet, low-toned conversation was of other lands and distant nations, and, while there was an entire absence of that ostentatious braggardism and dropsical egotism which unfortunately attacks the majority of travellers, his descriptions of foreign scenery were so graceful and brilliant, that despite her ungracious determination and premeditated dislike, she became a fascinated listener: and, more than once, found herself leaning forward to catch his words. Her own vivid fancy travelled with him over the lakes and isles, temples and palaces, he had visited; and, when the clock struck eleven, and a brief silence succeeded, she started as from some delightful dream.

"Janet, shall we have prayers, or have I already kept you up too late?"

Digitized by Google

Dr. Grey stooped and pressed his lips to his sister's wrinkled forehead, and her voice faltered slightly, as she answered, —

"It is never too late to thank God for all his goodness, especially in bringing my dear boy safely back to me. Salome, get the large Bible from the cushion in the parlor."

As the orphan placed the book in Dr. Grey's hand it opened at the record of births, where on the wide page appeared only the name of Ulpian Grey, and from the leaves fluttered a small bow of blue ribbon.

He picked it up, and, considering it merely a book-mark, would have replaced it, but Miss Jane exclaimed, —

"It is the blue knot that fastens that child's collar. Give it to her. She lost it yesterday, and has searched the house for it. How came it in that old Bible, which I am sure has not been used for fifteen years?"

Whatever solution of the mystery Salome might have deigned to offer, remained unuttered, for Dr. Grey kindly obviated the necessity of a reply by requesting her to bring him an additional candle from an adjoining room; and the superfluous celerity with which she started on the errand called a twinkle to his eye and a half-smothered smile to his lips. She felt assured that he was thoroughly cognizant of the curiosity which had prompted her researches among the family records, and inferred that he had either no vanity to be flattered by such trifles, or was dowered with too much generosity to evince any gratification at the discovery of an interest she would have vehemently disclaimed.

It was the first time she had ever bowed before the family altar, and, notwithstanding her avowed aversion to "Puritanic ceremonials and Pharisaical practices," she was unexpectedly awed and deeply impressed by the solemnity with which he conducted the brief services; while, despite her prejudice, his grave courtesy toward her, and the subdued tenderness that marked his treatment of his sister, commanded her involuntary respect. When she stood before the mirror in her own room, unbraiding her heavy hair, a dissatisfied expression robbed her

Digitized by Google

features of half their loveliness, and discontent ploughed distorting lines about the scarlet lips which muttered, —

"I wonder if, in one of his evil fits, my father sold and signed me away to Satan? I certainly am *bon gré mal gré* in bondage to him; for, from my inmost heart I hate 'good, pious, sanctified souls,' such as that marble man upstairs, who has come back to usurp my kingdom, and lord it over this heritage. After to-day a new regime. The potter's hands are fair and shapely, courteous and deft, but potter's hands nevertheless. Tough kneading he shall find it, and stiffer clay than ever yet was moulded, or my name is not Salome Owen. After all, how much better are we than the lower beasts of prey? In the race for riches there is but one alternative, — to devour, or be devoured; consequently that was an immemorial and well tested rule in the warfare that commenced when Adam and Eve found themselves shut out of Eden. 'Each for himself,' &c., &c., &c. Since I must *ex necessitate* prey or be preyed upon, I shall waste no time in deliberation."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN fifty-two years old, Daniel Grey amassed a handsome fortune by speculating in certain gold and coal mine stocks, which not only relieved him from the necessity of daily toil in his dusty counting-room, but elevated him to that more than Braminical caste, dubbed in Mammon-parlance — capitalists; whose decrees outweigh legislative statutes, and by feeling the pulse of stock-boards and all financial corporations, regulate the fiscal currents of the State. A few months subsequent to this sudden accession of wealth, his meek and devoted wife — who had patiently shared all the trials and hardships of his early impecunious career, and brightened an humble home which boasted no treasure com-

Digitized by Google

parable to her loving, unselfish heart, — was summoned to the enjoyment of a heritage beyond the stars; and Daniel Grey, capitalist, found himself a florid handsome widower, with two children, Enoch and Jane, to remind him continually of the pale wife over whose quiet ashes rose a costly mausoleum, where rare exotics nodded to each other across gilded slab and sculptured angels. That he profoundly mourned his loss no charitable mind could doubt, notwithstanding the obstinate fact that ere the violets had bloomed a twelvemonth over the dead mother of his children he had provided them with one who certainly bore her name, usurped her precious privileges, walked in her footsteps, but wofully failed to fill her place.

Mrs. Daniel Grey, scarcely the senior of the step-daughter whose lips most reluctantly framed the sacred word "mother," was a fresh fair young thing, whose ideas of marriage extended no further than diamonds, white satin, reception cards, and bridal presents; and whose regard for her worthy husband sought no surer basis than his bank-stock and insurance dividends. Dainty and bright, in tasteful and costly apparel, the pretty child-wife flitted up and down in his house and over the serene surface of his life, touching no feeling of his nature so deeply as that colossal *parvenu* vanity which exulted in the possession of a graceful walking announcement of his ability to clothe in fine fabrics and expensive jewels.

Perhaps the mildew that stained the ghastly gaunt angels who kept guard over the dust of the dead wife, extended yet further than the silent territory over which sexton and mattock reigned, for one dreary December night, instead of nestling for a post-prandial nap among the velvet cushions of his luxurious parlor, Daniel Grey, capitalist, slept his last sleep in a high-backed, comfortless chair before his desk, where the confidential clerk found him next morning, with his rigid icy fingers thrust between the leaves of his check-book.

According to the old Arab proverb, —

> "The black camel named Death kneeleth once at each door,
> And a mortal must mount to return nevermore."

Digitized by Google

And, past all peradventure, having borne away one member of the household, the "Last Carrier" from force of habit hastens to perform the same thankless service for the remainder; — thus ere summer sunshine streamed on the husband's grave, another yawned at its side, and a wreathed and fluted shaft shot up close to his mausoleum, to tell sympathizing friends and careless strangers that the second wife of Daniel Grey had been snatched away in the morning of life.

Her infant son Ulpian was committed to the tender guardianship of his maternal grandmother, in whose hands he remained until the close of his fourth year, when her death necessitated his return to the home of his only relatives, Enoch and Jane. At the request of his sister, the former had sold the elegant new residence in a fashionable quarter of the town, and removed to the old homestead and farm, hallowed by reminiscences of their mother, and invested with the magic attractions that early association weaves about the spots frequented in youth.

Manifesting, even in boyhood, an unconquerable repugnance not only to curriculum, but the monotonous routine of mercantile pursuits, Enoch sullenly forswore stock-jobbing and finance, and declared his intention of indulging his rural tastes and becoming a farmer. Fine cattle and poultry of all kinds, heavy wheat-crops, and well-stored corn-cribs engrossed his thoughts, to the entire exclusion of abstract æsthetic speculation, of operatic music, and Pre-Raphaelitism; while the sight of one of his silky short-horned Ayrshires yielded him infinitely more pleasure than the possession of all Rosa Bonheur's ideals could possibly have done, and the soft billowy stretch of his favorite clover-meadow was worth all the canvas that Claude or Poussin had ever colored. While Enoch had cordially hated his fair blue-eyed young step-mother, not from any personal or individual grounds of grievance, but simply and solely because she dared to occupy the household niche, sanctified once and forever by his own meek gentle-toned mother, he nevertheless tenderly loved her baby-boy; and as Ulpian grew to manhood

Digitized by Google

he became the idol, at whose shrine the brother and sister offered their pure and most intense affection.

Neither had married, and when the youngest of the household band completed his studies, and decided to accept a naval appointment, the consternation and grief which the announcement produced at the homestead, proved how essential the presence of the half-brother had become to the happiness of the sedate stolid Enoch, and equable unselfish Jane. But the desire to travel subordinated all other sentiments in Ulpian's nature, and he eagerly embarked for a cruise, from which he was recalled by tidings of the death of his brother.

A brief sojourn at the homestead had sufficed to arrange the affairs of the carefully-managed estate, and the young surgeon returned to his post aboard ship, in distant oriental seas. The increasing infirmity of his sister had finally induced the resignation of his cherished commission, and brought the man of thirty-five back to his home, where the "old familiar faces" seemed to have vanished forever; and, in lieu thereof, legions of cold-eyed strangers carelessly confronted him.

Emancipated from all restraint, and early consigned to the guidance of his boyish caprices and immature judgment, Ulpian Grey's character had unfolded itself under circumstances peculiarly favorable for the fostering of selfishness and the development of idiosyncrasies. As a plant, unmolested by man and beast, germinates, expands, and freely and completely manifests all its inherent tendencies, whether detrimental or beneficial to humanity, so Dr. Grey's matured manhood was no distorted or discolored result of repeated educational experiments, but a thoroughly normal efflorescence of an unbiassed healthful nature.

Habits of unwavering application and searching study, contracted in collegiate cloisters, tightened their grasp upon him, as he wandered away from the quiet precincts of *Alma Mater*, and into the crowded noisy campus of life; and even the gregarious and convivial manners prevalent aboard ship failed to divert his attention from the prosecution of scientific researches, or to retard his rapid progress in classical scholarship.

Digitized by Google

For the treasures of knowledge thus patiently and indefatigably garnered through a series of years, travel proved an invaluable polyglot commentator, analyzing, comparing, annotating, and italicizing, and had converted his mind into a vast, systematically arranged, pictorial encyclopædia of miscellaneous lore, embellished with delicate etchings, noble engravings, and gorgeous illuminations, — a thesaurus where *savants* might seek successfully for *data*, and whence artists could derive grand types, and pure tender coloring.

Reverent and loving appreciation of the intrinsically "true, good, and beautiful" was part of the homage that his nature rendered to its Creator, and instead of flowering into a morbid and maudlin sentimentality which craves low-browed, long straight-nosed, undraped statuettes in every nook and corner, — or dwarfs the soul and pins it to the surplice of some theologic *dogmata* claiming infallibility — or coffins the intellect in cramped, shallow, psychological categories, — it bore fruit in a wide-eyed, large-hearted, liberal-minded eclecticism, which, waging no crusade against the various Saladins of modern systems, quietly possessed itself of the really valuable elements that constitute the basis of every ethical, æsthetic, and scientific creed, which has for any length of time levied black-mail on the credulity of mankind.

Breadth of intellectual vision promotes moral and emotional expansion — for true catholicity of mind manufactures charity in the heart; and toleration is the real mesmeric current which brings the extremes of humanity *en rapport*, — is the veritable ubiquitous Samaritan always provided with wine and oil for the bruised and helpless, who are strewn along the highway of life; and those who penetrated beyond the polished surface of Dr. Grey's character, realized that no tinge of cynicism, no affectation of contempt for his country and countrymen lurked in his heart, while erudition and foreign sojourning seemed only to have warmed and intensified his sympathy with all noble aims — his compassion for all grovelling ones.

That his compulsory return to the uneventful routine of life at the homestead, involved a sacrifice which he would gladly

Digitized by Google

have avoided, he did not attempt to deny; but having invested a large amount of earnest, vigorous faith in the final conservatism of that much-abused monster which the seditious army of the Disappointed anathematize as "Bad Luck," he went to work contentedly in this new sphere of action, and waited patiently and trustfully for the slow grinding of the great mill of Compensation, into whose huge hopper Fate had unceremoniously poured all his plans.

His advent produced a very decided sensation not only in the quiet neighborhood in which the farm was located, but also in the adjacent town where the memory of Daniel Grey's meteoric ascent to pecuniosity still lingered in the minds of the oldest citizens, and pleasantly paved the way for a cordial reception of the fortunate son who inherited not only his mother's comeliness but his father's hoarded wealth.

Living in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in a hemisphere completely antipodal to that in which Utopia was situated, or "Bensalem" dreamed of, the appearance of a good-looking, well-educated, affluent bachelor could not fail to stir all gossipdom to its dregs; and society, ever tenderly concerned about the individual affairs of its prominent members, was all agog — busily arranging for the *ci-devant* United States Surgeon a programme, than which he would sooner have undertaken the feats of Samson or the Avatars of Vishnu.

His published card, announcing the fact that he had permanently located in the city and was a patient candidate for the privilege of setting fractured limbs and administering medicine, somewhat dashed the expectations of many who conjectured that the Grey estate could not possibly be worth the amount so long reputed, or the principal heir would certainly not soil his fingers with pills and plasters, instead of sauntering and dawdling with librettos, lorgnettes, meerschaums, and curiously-carved canes cut in the Hebrides or the jungles of Java.

Over the door of that office, where the Angel of Death had smitten his father thirty-five years before, a new sign swung in the breeze, and showed the citizens the name of "Dr. Ulpian Grey Office hours from nine to ten, and from two to three."

Digitized by Google

The members of the profession called formally to welcome him to a share of their annual profits, and collectively gave him a dinner; the "best families" invited him to tea or luncheon, croquet or "German," and thus, having accomplished his professional and social *début*, Ulpian Grey, M.D., henceforth claimed and exercised the privilege of selecting his associates, and employing his time as inclination prompted.

In the comprehensive course of study to which he had so long devoted his attention, he had not omitted that immemorial stereotyped volume — Human Nature — which, despite the attempted revisions of sages, politicians, and ecclesiastics, remains as immutable as the everlasting hills; printing upon the leaves of the youngest century phases of guilt and guilelessness which find their prototypes in the gray dawn of time, when the "morning stars sang together," — yea, busy to-day as of yore, slaughtering Abel, stoning Stephen, fretting Moses, crucifying Christ. Finding much that was admirable, and more that seemed ignoble, he gravely and reverently sought to possess himself of the subtle arcana of this marvellous book, rejecting as equally erroneous and unreliable the magnifying zeal of optimism and the gloomy jaundiced lenses of sneering pessimism, — thoroughly satisfied that it was a solemn duty, obligatory upon all, to study that complex paradoxical human nature, for the mastery of which Lucifer and Jesus had ceaselessly battled since the day when Adam and Eve were called "to dress and to keep" the Garden by the Euphrates, — that heaven-born, heaven-cursed, restless human nature, which now, as then, —

> "Grasps at the fruitage forbidden,
> The golden pomegranates of Eden,
> To quiet its fever and pain."

A few days' residence under the same roof, and a guarded observation of Salome's conduct, sufficed to acquaint Dr. Grey with the ungenerous motives that induced her chagrin at his return; and, without permitting her to suspect that he had so accurately read her character, he endeavored as unobtrusively

Digitized by Google

as possible to bridge by kindness and courtesy the chasm of jealous distrust which divided them.

Indolent and self-indulgent, she neither brooked dictation, nor gracefully accepted any suggestions at variance with the reigning whim; for, since she became an inmate of Miss Jane's hospitable home, existence had been a mere dreamy, aimless succession of golden dawns and scarlet-curtained sunsets — a slow, quiet lapsing of weeks into months, —an almost stagnant stream curled by no eddies, freighted with few aspirations, bearing no drift.

The circumstances and associations of her early life had destroyed her faith in abstract nobility of character; self-abnegation she neither comprehended nor deemed possible; and of a stern, innate moral heroism she was utterly sceptical; consequently a delicately graduated scale of selfishness was the sole balance by which she was wont to weigh men and women.

Her irregular method of study and desultory reading had rather enervated than strengthened a mind naturally clear and vigorous, and left its acquisitions in a confused and kaleidoscopic mass, bordering upon intellectual salmagundi.

One warm afternoon, on his return from town, as Dr. Grey ascended the steps he noticed Salome reclining on a bamboo settee at the western end of the gallery, where the sunshine was hot and glaring, unobstructed by the thin leafy screen of vines that drooped from column to column on the southern and eastern sides of the building. If conscious of his approach she vouchsafed not the slightest intimation of it, and when he stood beside her she remained so immovable that he might have imagined her asleep but for the lambent light which rayed out from eyes that seemed intently numbering the soft fluttering young leaves on a distant clump of elm trees, which made a lace-like tracery of golden glimmer and quivering shadow on the purple-headed clover at their feet.

Her fair but long slender fingers carelessly held a book that threatened to slip from their light relaxing grasp, and compressing his lips in order to smother a smile under his heavy mous

Digitized by Google

tache, Dr. Grey stooped and put his hand on her plump white wrist, where the blue veins were running riot.

"So young, — yet cataleptic! Unfortunate, indeed," he murmured.

She shook off his touch, and instantly sat erect.

"I should be glad to know what you mean."

"I have an admirable, nay, I venture to add, an almost infallible prescription for catalepsy, which has cured two chronic and apparently hopeless cases, and it will afford me great pleasure to try the third experiment upon you, since you seem pitiably in want of a remedy."

"Thank you. Were I as free from all other ills that 'flesh is heir to,' as I certainly am of the taint of catalepsy, I might indeed congratulate myself upon an immunity which would obviate the dire necessity of ever meeting a physician."

"Are you sure that you sufficiently understand the symptoms, to recognize them unerringly?"

The rose tint in her cheeks deepened to scarlet, as she haughtily drew herself up to her full height, and answered, —

"Dr. Grey himself is not more sagacious and adroit in detecting them; especially when open eyes discover unwelcome and disagreeable objects, which, wishing to avoid, they are still compelled to see. I hope you are satisfied that I comprehend you."

"My meaning was not so occult as to justify a doubt upon that subject; and moreover, Salome, lack of astuteness is far from being your greatest defect. My motive should eloquently plead pardon for my candor, if I venture to tell you that your frequent affectation of unconsciousness of the presence of others, 'is a custom more honored in the breach than the observance,' and may prove prolific of annoyance in coming years; for curtesy constitutes the key-stone in the beautiful arch of social amenities which vaults the temple of Christian virtues. Lest you should take umbrage at my frankness, which ought to assure you of my interest in your happiness and improvement, permit me to remind you of the oriental definition of a faithful friend, that has more pith than verbal polish, —

Digitized by Google

'The true friend is not he who holds up Flattery's mirror, —
In which the face to thy conceit most pleasing hovers;
But he who kindly shows thee all thy vices, sirrah!
And helps thee mend them ere an enemy discovers.'"

Rising, Salome swept him a profound courtesy, and, while her fingers beat a tattoo on the book she held, she watched him with a peculiar sparkle in her eyes, which he had already learned to understand was a beacon flame kindled by intense displeasure. Dr. Grey seated himself, and, taking off his hat, said gently and winningly, as he pushed aside the hair that clustered in brown rings over his forehead, —

"Here is ample room for both of us. Sit down, and be reasonable; and let me catch a glimpse of the amiable elements which I feel assured must exist somewhere in your nature, notwithstanding your persistent endeavor to conceal them. Your Janus character has hitherto breathed only war — war; but, my young friend, I earnestly invoke its peaceful phase."

The kindness of tone and evident sincerity of manner might have disarmed a prejudice better founded than hers; but wrath consumed all scruples, and, recollecting his forbearance with various former acts of rudeness, she presumed to attempt further aggressions.

Waving her hand in tacit rejection of the proffered share of the settee, she answered with more emphasis than perspicuity demanded, —

"Does your reading of the book of Job encourage you to believe that when those self-appointed counsellors — Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite — returned to their respective homes, they had cause to congratulate themselves upon their cordial welcome to Job's bank of ashes, or felt bountifully repaid for their voluntary mission of advice?"

"Unfortunately, no. My study of the record of the man of Uz renders painfully patent that humiliating fact — old as humanity — that sanctity of motive is no coat-of-mail to the luckless few who bravely bear to the hearts of those with whom they associate the unwelcome burden of unflattering truths.

Digitized by Google

Phraseology — definitions — vary with advancing centuries, but not so the human impulses they express or explain; and friendship in the days of Job was the identical 'Mutual Admiration Society,' which at present converts its consistent servile members into Damon and Pythias, but punishes any violation of its canons with hatred dire and inextinguishable. Were I blessed with the genius of Praxiteles or of Angelo, I would chisel and bequeath to the world a noble statue, — typical of that rare, fearless friendship, which, walking through the la retto of diseased and morbid natures, bears not honied draughts alone, but scalpel, caustic, and bitter tonics."

The calm sweetness of voice and mien lent to his words an influence which no amount of gall or satire could have imparted; and, in the brief silence that ensued, Salome's heart was suddenly smitten with a humiliating consciousness of her childish flippancy, — her utter inferiority to this man, who seemed to walk serenely in a starry plane far beyond the mire where she grovelled.

Ridicule braced and exaggerated her weaknesses, and the strokes of sarcasm she could adroitly parry; but for persistent magnanimity she was no match, and recoiled before it like the traditional Fiend at sight of the *Santo Sudario*. Watching her companion's quiet countenance, she saw a shadow drift over it, betokening neither anger nor scorn, but serious regret; and involuntarily she drooped her head to avoid the eyes that now turned full upon her.

"Since I became a man, and to some extent capable of discriminating with reference to the characters of persons with whom I found myself in contact, I have made and invariably observed one rule of conduct, — namely, never to associate with those whom I can not respect. Ignorance, want of refinement, irritability of temper, and even lack of generous impulses, I can forgive, when redeemed by candor and stern honesty of purpose; but arrogance, dissimulation, and all-absorbing selfishness I will not tolerate. In you I hoped and expected better qualities than you permit me to find, and I trust you will acquit me of intentional rudeness if I acknowledge that you have pain-

Digitized by Google

fully disappointed me. It was, and still is, my earnest wish to befriend and to aid you, — to contribute to your happiness, and cordially sympathize in any annoyances that may surround you; but thus far you have rendered it impossible for me to esteem you, and while I do not presume that my good opinion is of any importance to you, our present relations compel me to request that our intercourse may in future be characterized by more urbanity than has yet graced it. My sister has been much pained by the feelings with which you evidently regard me, and since you and I are merely guests under her roof, a due deference to her wishes should certainly repress the exhibition of antipathies towards those whom she loves. It is her earnest desire (as expressed in a conversation which I had with her yesterday) that I should treat you as a young sister; and, for her sake, I offer you once more, and for the last time, my hearty assistance in any department in which I am able to render it."

"The folds of your flag of truce do not conceal the drawn sword beneath it; and let me tell you, sir, it is very evident that 'demand' would far better have expressed your purpose than the word 'request.'"

"At least you should not be surprised if I doubt whether you regard any truce as inviolable, and am inclined to suspect you of latent treachery."

"Your accusation of dissimulation is unjust, for I have openly, fearlessly manifested my prejudice — my aversion."

"That you dislike me is my misfortune, but that you allow your detestation to generate discord in our small circle is an error which I trust you will endeavor to correct. That I have many faults I shall not attempt to deny; but mutual forbearance will prove a mutual blessing. For Jane's sake, shall there not be peace between us?"

Standing before her, he looked gravely down into her face, where flush and sparkle had died out, and saw — what she was too proud to confess — that he had partially conquered her waywardness, that she was reluctantly yielding to his influence; but he understood her nature too thoroughly to pause contented

Digitized by Google

with this slight advantage in a contest which he foresaw must determine the direction of her aims through life.

"Salome, I am waiting for your decision."

Her lips stirred twice, but the words they framed were either too haughty or too humble, for she refused them utterance; and, while she deliberated, two tears settled the question by rolling swiftly over her cheeks, and falling upon the cherry ribbon at her throat.

Accepting it as a tacit signature to his terms of capitulation, and satisfied with the result, Dr. Grey forbore to urge verbal assurances. Taking the book from her hand, he said, pleasantly, —

"Are you fond of French? I frequently find you poring over your grammar."

"I have never had a teacher, nor have I conquered the conjugations; consequently, I know comparatively little about the language."

"Are you studying it with the intention of familiarizing yourself with French literature, or merely to enable you to translate the few phrases that modern writers sprinkle through novels and essays?"

"For neither purpose, but simply because it is the court language of the old world; and, if I should succeed in my hope of visiting Europe, I might regret my ignorance of the universally received medium of communication."

"Have you, then, no desire to master those noble bursts of eloquence by which Racine, Bossuet, Fénélon, and Cousin have charmed the intellects of all nations?"

"None, whatever. I might as well tell you at once, what you will inevitably discover ere long if you condescend to inspect my meagre attainments, that for abstract study I have no more inclination than to fondle some mummy in the crypts of Cyrene, or play 'blind man's buff' with the corpses in the Morgue. My limited investments of time and thought in intellectual stock have been made solely with reference to speedy dividends of most practical and immediate benefit; and knowledge *per se* — knowledge which will not pay me handsome interest — has no

Digitized by Google

more value in my eyes than a handful of the dust of those Atures found in the cavern of Ataruipe. Doubtless you think me pitiably benighted, and possibly I might find more favor in your sight if I affected a prodigious amount of literary enthusiasm, and boundless admiration for scholarship and erudition; but that would prove too troublesome an imposture,—for I am constitutionally, habitually, and premeditatedly lazy."

She saw a smile lurking under his heavy lashes, and half ambushed in the corners of his mouth; and, vaguely conscious that she was rendering herself ridiculous, she bit her lip with ill-disguised vexation.

"Salome, I am afraid that under the garb of a jest you are making me acquainted with a very mournful truth. You have probably never heard of Lessing,—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing."

"Oh, I am not quite as ignorant as a Pitcairn's Islander; and I think I have somewhere seen that such a person as Lessing lived at Wolfenbüttel. He once said, 'The chase is always worth more than the quarry.' And again, 'Did the Almighty, holding in his right hand Truth, and in his left Search after Truth, deign to proffer me the one I might prefer,—in all humility, but without hesitation, I should request Search after Truth.' When you have nothing more important to occupy your attention, give ten minutes' reflection to his admonition, and perhaps it may declare a dividend years hence. Last week I found your algebra on the rug before the library grate, and noticed several sums worked out in pencil on the margin. Are you fond of mathematics?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"What progress have you made?"

"My knowledge of arithmetic is barely sufficient to take me through a brief shopping expedition."

"Have you no ambition to increase it?"

"Dr. Grey, I have no ambition. That 'last infirmity of noble minds' has never attacked me; and, folding my hands, I chant ceaselessly to my soul, 'Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' The rapture of the mathematician, who bows before the

Digitized by Google

shrine of his favorite science, is to my dull intellect as incomprehensible as the jargon of metaphysics or the mysteries wrapped up in Pali cerements. Equations, conic sections, differential calculus, constitute a skull and cross-bones to which I allow as wide a berth as possible."

The weary, dissatisfied expression of her large, luminous eyes, belied the sneer in her voice and the curl of her thin lip, and it cost her an effort to answer his next question.

"Will you tell me what rule you have adopted for the distribution of your time, and the government of your life?"

"Yes, sir; you are heartily welcome to it: 'Yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.' *Laissez nous faire.* Moreover, Dr. Grey, if you will courteously lend me your ears, I will favor you with a still more felicitous exposition of my invaluable organon."

Stooping suddenly, she raised from the floor a small volume which had been concealed by her dress, and, as it opened at a page stained with the juice of a purple convolvulus, she smiled defiantly, and read with almost scornful emphasis, —

. . . . "'Ah, why
Should life all labor be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall, and cease:
Give us long rest or death; dark death or dreamful ease.'

There, Dr. Grey, you have my creed and method, — *Laissez nous faire.*"

With a degree of gravity that trenched on sternness, he bowed, and answered, —

"So be it. I might insist that the closing lines of 'Ulysses' nobly refute all the numbing heresy of the 'Lotos Eaters,' —

Digitized by Google

. . . . . 'But something ere the end,
Some work of noble note may yet be done.
That which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.'

But I will not rouse you from a lethargy, which, knowing it to be fatal to all hopes of usefulness, you still deliberately prefer. Take care, however, lest you bury the one original talent so deep that you fail to unearth it when the Master demands it in the final day of restitution. I have questioned you concerning your studies, because I desired and intended to offer my services as tutor, while you prosecuted mathematics and the languages; but I forbear to suggest a course so evidently distasteful to you. Unless I completely misjudge your character, I fear the day is not distant, when, haunted by ghosts of strangled opportunities, you will realize the solemn and painful truth, that,—

'There is nothing a man knows, in grief or in sin,
Half so bitter as to think, What I might have been!'"

CHAPTER III.

"SALOME, you look so weary that I must insist upon relieving you. Give me the book, and run out for a breath of fresh air — a glimpse of blue sky."

Dr. Grey laid his hand on the volume, but the girl shook her head and pushed aside his fingers.

"I am not at all tired, and even if I were it would make no difference. Miss Jane desires me to read this sermon aloud, and I shall finish it."

The invalid, who had been confined to her bed for many days by a severe attack of rheumatism, partially raised herself on one elbow, and said,—

Digitized by Google

"My dear, give him the book, while you take a little exercise You have been pent up here long enough, and, moreover, I want to talk to Ulpian about some business matters. Don't look so sullen, my child; it makes no difference who reads the sermon to me. Kiss me, and run out on the lawn."

The orphan relinquished chair and book, but there was no relaxation of her bent brows, and neither warmth nor lingering pressure in the firm, hardly drawn lips, which lightly touched the old lady's sallow, wrinkled cheek. When she had left the room, closing the door after her with more force than was requisite to bolt it securely, Miss Jane sighed heavily, and turned to her brother.

"Poor thing! She is so jealous of you; and it distresses me to see that no friendship grows up between you, as I hoped and believed would be the case. If you would only notice her a little more I think you might win her over."

"Leave it to time, Janet. I 'have piped unto her and she would not dance; I have mourned unto her, and she has not lamented,'—and concessions only feed her waywardness. If there be a residuum of good sense and proper feeling in her nature, they will assert themselves after a while; if not, all extraneous influences are futile. I will resume the reading, if agreeable to you."

Moody and rebellious, Salome stood for some moments on the threshold of the front door, staring vacantly out over the lawn; then, snatching her hat from a hook in the hall, she swiftly crossed the grounds, climbed over a low lattice fence at the foot of the declivity, and followed a worn but neglected path leading into the adjoining forest.

The sanctity of the Sabbath afternoon rested like a benison over the silent glades, where sunshine made golden roads along the smooth brown pine straw, and glinted on the purple flags that fluttered in the mild west wind. Even the melancholy plaint of sad-eyed dun doves was hushed, as they slowly swung in the swaying pine-tops; and two young lambs, neglected by the wandering flock, lay sleeping quietly, with their snowy heads pillowed on clustering violets,- far from the fold, forgotten

Digitized by Google

by their mothers, at the mercy of strolling dogs, watched only by the Great Shepherd.

Salome's rapid pace soon placed a mile between her and the fence that bounded the lawn; and, pushing through the dense undergrowth which betokened the proximity of a stream, she stood ere long on the margin of a wide pond which supplied the broad, shining sheet of beryl water that poured over the rocky dam, close to the large irregular building called "Grey's Mill."

Piles of lumber were bleaching in the sunshine, but the machinery was at rest, the workmen were all absent, and not a sound broke the stillness, save the steady, monotonous chant of the water leaping down into the race, where a thousand foam-flakes danced along towards the huge wheels, and died on the soft green mosses and lush-creepers that stole down to bathe in the sparkling wavelets. The knotted roots of an old beech tree furnished a resting-place, and Salome sat down and leaned her head against the scarred trunk, where lightning had once girdled and partially destroyed it, — leaving one-half the branches leafy, the remainder scorched and barren.

Overhanging willows darkened the edges of the pond; and, in the centre, one tall, venerable cypress, lonely as some palm in the desert, rose like a gray shaft tufted with a fine fringe of fresh green; and occasional clusters of broad, shining leaves, spread themselves on the surface of the water, cradling large, snowy lilies, whose gold-powdered stamens trembled ceaselessly. Now and then a trout leaped up, as if for a breath of May air, and fell back into the circle that widened until it touched either bank; and not far from a cow who stood knee-deep in water, browsing on a wild rose that clambered over the willows to peep at its pink image in the pond, a proud pair of gray geese convoyed a brood of yellow younglings that dived and broasted the ripples with evident glee.

With her arms clasped around her knees, Salome sat watching the blue tendrils of smoke that rose from a clump of elms beyond the mill and curled lazily upward until they lost themselves in air; and, though the arching elm boughs hid mossy roof and chimney, she nevertheless felt that she was looking at

Digitized by Google

the old house where she was born, and where ten dreary years of sorrow and humiliation had embittered and perverted her nature.

Those elms had seen her mother die, had heard her father's drunken revelry, and bent their aged heads to listen on that wild wintry night, when in blood-curdling curses his soul rent itself from the degraded tenement of clay. Apparently peace brooded over earth, sky, and water; but to that lonely figure under the riven beech, every object within the range of vision babbled horrible tales of the early years, and memory pointed to a corner of the lumber-shed adjoining the mill where she had often secreted herself to avoid her father's brutality, — always keeping her head in the moonshine, because she dreaded the darkness inside, which childish fancy filled with ghostly groups. She hated the place as she hated the past, and this was the second time she had visited it since the day that consigned her to the poor-house; for it was impossible for her to look at the pond without recollecting one dark passage in her life, known only to God and herself. To-day she recalled, with startling vividness, a dusky, star-lit June evening, when, maddened by an unmerited and unusually severe punishment inflicted by her father, she had resolved to drown herself, and find peace in the mud at the bottom of the mill-pond. Placing her infant sister on the grass, she had kissed her good-by, and selecting the deepest portion of the water, had climbed out on a willow branch and prepared for the final plunge. Putting her fingers in her ears that she might not hear the bubbling of the murderous water, she shut her eyes and sprang into the pond; but her long hair caught the willow twigs, and, half strangled and quite willing to live, she scrambled up into the low limbs that seemed so anxious to rescue her from a watery grave; and, dripping and trembling, crept back to the house, comforting herself with the grim assurance that whatever else might befall, she certainly was not foreordained to be either beaten to death or drowned. The impulse which had brought her on this occasion to a scene so fraught with harrowing memories, was explicable only by the supposition that its painful surroundings were in consonance

Digitized by Google

with the bitter and despondent mood in which she found herself; and, in the gloom that this retrospection shed over her countenance, her features seemed to grow wan and angular For several days she had been sorely disquieted by the realization of Miss Jane's rapidly failing strength; and the probability of her death, which a year ago would have been entirely endurable as an avenue to wealth, now appeared the direst catastrophe that had yet threatened her ill-starred life.

It was distressing to think of the kind old face growing stiff in a shroud, but infinitely more appalling to contemplate the possibility of being turned out of a comfortable home and driven to labor for a maintenance. Salome had a vague impression that either Providence or the world owed her a luxurious future, as partial compensation for her juvenile miseries; but since both seemed disposed to repudiate the debt, she was reluctantly compelled to ponder her prospective bankruptcy in worldly goods, and, like the unjust steward, while unwilling to work she was still ashamed to beg.

Although she strenuously resisted the strong, steady influence so quietly exerted by Dr. Grey, the best elements of her nature, long dormant, began to stir feebly, and she was conscious of nobler aspirations than those which had hitherto swayed her; and of a dimly-defined self-dissatisfaction that was novel and annoying. Unwilling to admit that she valued his good opinion, she nevertheless felt chagrined at her failure to possess it, and gradually she realized her utter inferiority to this man, whose consistent Christian character commanded an entire respect which she had never before entertained for any human being. Immersed in vexing thoughts concerning her future, she mechanically stretched out her hand to pluck a bunch of phlox and of lemon-hued primroses that were nodding in the sunshine close to her feet; but, as she touched the stems, a large copper-colored snake slowly uncoiled from the tuft of grass where they nestled, and, gliding into the water, disappeared in the midst of the lilies.

"I wonder if throughout life all the flowers I endeavor to grasp will prove only Moccasin-beds! Why should they,—

Digitized by Google

unless God abdicates and Satan reigns? I have found, to my cost, that existence is not made entirely of rainless June days; but I doubt whether darkness and storms shut out the warm glow and perpetually curtain the stars. Obviously I am no saint; still, I am disposed to believe I am not altogether wicked. I have committed no capital sins, nor grievously transgressed the decalogue, — and why should I despair of my share of the good things of life? I am neither Cain nor Jezebel, and therefore Fates and Furies have no warrant to dog my footsteps. Moreover, how do I know that Destiny is indeed the hideous, vindictive crone that luckless wretches have painted her, instead of an amiable, good soul, who is quite as willing to scatter blessings as curses? Because some dyspeptic Greek dreamed of three pitiless old weavers, blind to human tears, deaf to human petitions, why should we wise and enlightened people of the nineteenth century scare ourselves with the skeleton of Paganism? I have as inalienable a right to brocades, crown-jewels, and a string of titles, as any reigning queen, provided I can only get my hands upon them; and, since life seems to be a sort of snatch-and-hold game, quick keen eyes and nimble fingers decide the question. I have never trodden on the world's tender toes, nor smitten its pet follies, nor set myself aloft to gaze pityingly on its degradation; therefore, the world honors me with no special grudge. But one thing is mournfully certain, — my path is not strewn with loaves and fishes ready baked and broiled, and I must even go gleaning and fishing for myself. Almost everybody has some gift or some mission; but I really do not see in what direction I can set to work. Work! How I hate the bare thought! I have not sufficient education to teach, nor genius to write, nor a talent for drawing, and barely music enough in my soul to enable me to carry the church tunes respectably. Come, Salome Owen! Shake off your sloth, and face the abominable fact that you must earn your own bread. It is a great shame, and I ought not to be obliged to work, for I am not responsible for my existence, and those who brought me into the world owed it to me to provide for my wants. I can not and will not forgive my father and mother; but that will

Digitized by Google

not mend matters, since, nevertheless, here I am, with a body to feed and clothe, and God only knows how I am to accomplish it. I find myself with youth, health, some beauty, an average share of intellect, and all the wants pertaining thereunto. If the worst comes to the worst I suppose I can contrive, like other poverty-stricken girls, to marry somebody who will support me comfortably; but that is rather an uncertain speculation, and meantime Miss Jane might die. Now, if the Bible is true, it must indeed be a blessed lot to be born a brown sparrow, and have the Lord for a commissary. I am a genuine child of old Adam, and labor is the heaviest curse that could possibly be sent upon me."

Once or twice during this profitless reverie she had paused to listen to a singular sound that came from a dense group of willows not far from the spot where she sat, and now it grew louder, swelling into a measured cry, as of a child in great distress.

"Somebody in trouble, but it does not concern me; I have enough and to spare, of my own."

She settled herself once more quite comfortably, but the low, monotonous wail, smote her heart, and womanly sympathy with suffering strangled her constitutional selfishness. Rising, she crept cautiously along the edge of the pond until she reached the thicket whence the sound proceeded, and, as she pushed aside the low branches and peeped into the cool, green nook, her eyes fell upon the figure of a little boy who lay on the ground, rolling from side to side and sobbing violently.

"What is the matter? Are you sick or hungry?"

Startled by the sound of her voice, the child uttered a scream of terror, and whirled over, hiding his face in the leaves and grass.

"For Heaven's sake, stop howling! What are you about,—wallowing here in the mud, ruining your clothes, and yelling like a hyena? Hush, and get up."

"Oh, please, ma'am, don't tell on me! Don't carry me back, and I will hush!"

"Where do you live?"

Digitized by Google

"Nowhere. Oh! — oh!" And he renewed his cries.

"A probable story. What is your name?"

"Havn't got any name."

"You have no name, and you live nowhere? Come, little fellow, this will never do. I am afraid you are a very bad boy and have run away from home to escape being punished. Hush this instant!"

He had kept his face carefully concealed, and, resolved to ascertain the truth, Salome stooped and tried to lift him; but he struggled desperately, and screamed frantically, —

"Let me alone! I won't go back! I will jump into the pond and drown myself if you don't let me alone."

He was so hoarse from constant crying that she could recognize no familiar tones in his voice, but a great dread seized her, and, suddenly putting her hands under his head, she forced the face up, and looked at the flushed, swollen features.

"Stanley! Is it possible? My poor little brother!"

The equally astonished boy started up, and stared half wistfully, half fearfully, at the figure standing before him.

"Is it you, Salome? I did not know you."

"How came you here? When did you leave the Asylum?"

"I ran away, three days ago."

"Why?"

"Because I was tired of living there, and I wanted to come back home."

"Home, indeed! You miserable beggar, don't you know you have no home but the Orphan Asylum?"

"Yes, I have. I want to come back yonder. Don't you see home yonder, among the trees, with the pretty white and speckled pigeons flying over it?"

He pointed across the pond to the old house beyond the mill, whose outlines were visible through the openings in the elms; and, as he gazed upon it with that intense longing so touching in a child's face, his sobs increased.

"Stanley, that is not your home now. Other people live there, and you have no right to come back. Why did you run away from the Asylum? Did they treat you unkindly?"

Digitized by Google

"No,—yes. They whipped me because I cried and said I hated to stay there, and wanted to come home."

Salome looked at the soiled, torn clothes, and sorrowful face; and, bursting into tears, she bent forward and drew her brother to her bosom. He put his arms around her neck, and kissed her cheek several times, saying, softly and coaxingly,—

"Sister Salome, you won't send me back will you? Please let me stay with you, and I will be a good boy."

For some minutes she was unable to reply, and wept silently as she smoothed the tangled hair back from the child's white forehead and pressed her lips to it.

"Stanley, how is Jessie? Where did you leave her?"

"She is well, and I left her at the Asylum. She had a long cry the night I ran away, and said she wanted to see you, and she thought you had forgotten us both. You know, Salome, it is over a year since you came to see us, and Jessie and I are so lonesome there, we hate the place."

"What were you crying so bitterly about when I found you, just now?"

"I am so hungry, and the man who lives yonder at home drove me away. He said I was prowling around to steal something, and if he saw me there any more he would shoot me. I ate my last piece of biscuit yesterday."

"Why did you not come to me instead of the miller?"

"I was afraid you would send me back to the Asylum; but you won't,—I know you won't, Salome."

"Suppose I had not happened to hear you crying,—what would have become of you? Did you intend to starve here in the swamp?"

"I thought I would wait till the miller left home, and then beg his wife to give me some bread, and, if I could get nothing, I was going to pull up some carrots that I saw growing in a field back of the house. Oh, Salome, I am so hungry and so tired!"

She sat down on a heap of last year's leaves, which autumn winds and winter rains had driven against the trunk of a decayed and fallen sweet-gum, and, drawing the weary head with

Digitized by Google

its shock of matted yellow curls to her lap, she covered her own face with her hands to hide the hot tears that streamed over her cheeks.

"Salome, are you very mad with me?"

"Yes, Stanley; you have behaved very badly, and I don't know what I ought to do with you."

He tried to put aside one of her shielding hands, and failing, wound his arms around her waist, and nestled as close as possible.

"Sister, please let me stay and live with you, and I promise — I declare — I will be a good boy."

"Poor little fellow! You don't in the least know what you are talking about. How can you live with me when I have no home, and not a dollar?"

"I thought you stayed with a rich lady, and had everything nice that you wanted."

"I do not expect to have even a shelter much longer. The lady who takes care of me is sick, and cannot live very long; and, when she dies, I don't know where I shall go or what I may be obliged to do."

"If you will only keep me I will help you work. At the Asylum I saw wood, and pick peas, and pull out grass and weeds from the strawberry vines, and sometimes I sweep the yards. Just try me a little while, Salome, and see how smart I can be."

"Would you be willing to leave poor little Jessie at the Asylum? If she felt so lonesome when you were there, how will she get along without you?"

"Oh, we could steal her out some night, and keep her with us. Salome, I tell you I don't mean to go back there. I will die first. I will drown myself, or run away to sea. I would rather starve to death here in the swamp. Everybody else can get a home, and why can't we?"

"Because your father was a drunkard, and left his children to the charity of the poor-house; and, God knows, I heartily wish we were all screwed down in the same coffin with him. You and I, Jessie, and Mark, and Joel, are all beggars — mise-

Digitized by Google

rable beggars! Hush, Stanley, you will sob yourself into a fever! Stop crying, I say, if you do not want to drive me crazy! I thought I had trouble enough, without being tormented by the sight of your poor, wretched face; and now, what to do with you I am sure I don't know. There — do be quiet. Take your arms away; I don't want you to kiss me any more."

In the long silence that succeeded, the child, spent with grief and fatigue, fell into a sound sleep, and Salome sat with his head in her lap and her clasped hands resting on her knee.

The afternoon slowly wore away, and the dimpled pond caught lengthening shadows on its surface as the sun dipped into the forest. The measured tinkle of a distant bell told that the cows were wending quietly homeward; and, while the miller's wife drove her geese into the yard, the pigeons nestled in their leafy coverts high among the elm arches, and the solemn serenity of coming summer night stole with velvet tread over the scene, silencing all things save the silvery barcarolle of the falling water, and the sweet, lonely vesper hymn of a whippoorwill, half hidden in the solitary cypress.

Although tears came very rarely to her eyes, the orphan had wept bitterly, and, surprised at finding herself so completely unnerved on this occasion, she made a powerful effort to regain her composure and usual stolidity of expression. Shaking the little sleeper, she said, —

"Wake up, Stanley. Get your hat and come with me, at least for to-night."

The child was too weary to renew the conversation, and, hand in hand, the two walked silently on until they approached the confines of the farm, when Salome suddenly paused at sight of Dr. Grey, who was crossing the pine forest just in front of them. Pressing his sister's hand, Stanley looked up and asked, timidly, —

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Hush! I have not fully decided."

She endeavored to elude observation by standing close to the body of a large pine, but Dr. Grey caught a glimpse of her flut-

Digitized by Google

tering dress, and came forward rapidly, carrying in his arms one young lamb and driving another before him.

"Salome, will you be so good as to assist me in shepherding this obstinate little waif? It has been running hither and thither for nearly half an hour, taking every direction but the right one. If you will either walk on and lower the bars for me or drive this lamb while I go forward, you will greatly oblige me. Pardon me, — you look distressed Something painful has occurred, I fear."

The girl's usually firm mouth trembled as she laid her hand on the torn straw hat that shaded Stanley's features, and answered, hurriedly, —

"Yes. We have both stumbled upon stray lambs; but mine, unfortunately, happens to prove my youngest brother, and, since I am neither Reuben nor Judah, I could not leave him in the woods to perish. Stanley, run on and pull down the bars yonder, where you see the sheep looking through the fence."

"How old is he?"

"About eight years, I believe, but he is small for his age."

"He does not in the least resemble you."

"No; pitiable little wretch, he looks like nothing but destitution! When a poor man dies, leaving a houseful of beggarly orphans, the State ought to require the undertaker who buries him to shoot or hang the whole brood, and lay them all in the Potter's Field out of the world's way."

"Such words and sentiments are strangely at variance with the affectionate gentleness and resignation which best become womanly lips, and I pity the keen suffering that wrings them from yours. He who 'setteth the solitary in families' never yet failed in loving guardianship of trusting orphanage, and certainly you have no cause to upbraid fate, or impiously murmur against the decrees of your God."

He stood before her, with one hand stroking the head of the lamb that nestled on his bosom; but his face was sterner, his voice far more severe, than she had ever known either before, and her eyes fell beneath the grave and sorrowful rebuke which looked out from his.

Digitized by Google

"Your brother ran away from the Asylum, three days ago."

"How did you ascertain that fact?"

"About an hour after you left the house, the matron of the Asylum sent to inquire whether you were aware of his absence, and to notify you that your little sister Jessie is quite ill. I was searching for you, when I accidentally found these lambs, deserted by their mother. Thank you, Stanley; I will put up the bars, and you can go to the house with your sister. Salome, the carriage is ready, and if you desire to see Jessie immediately I will take you over as soon as possible. There is a full moon, and you can return with me or remain at the Asylum until morning. Confer with my sister concerning the disposal of this little refugee."

He patted the boy's head, and entered the sheepfold, while Salome stood leaning against the fence, looking vacantly down at the bleating flock.

Catching her brother's hand, she hurried to the house, bathed his face, brushed his disordered hair, and gave him a bountiful supper of bread and milk; after which, Jane Grey ordered the little culprit brought to her bedside, where she delivered a kind lecture on his sinful disobedience. When Dr. Grey entered the room, Salome was standing at the window, while Stanley clung to her dress, hiding his face in its folds, vowing vehemently that he would not return to the Asylum, and protesting with many sobs that he would be the best boy in the world if he were only allowed to remain at the farm.

"Salome, do quiet him; he will fret himself into a fever," said Miss Jane, whose nerves began to quiver painfully.

"He has it already," answered the girl, without turning her head. She did not observe Dr. Grey's entrance, and when he approached the window, where the mellow moonshine streamed full on her face, he saw tears stealing over her cheeks, and noticed that her fingers were clenched tightly.

"Salome, do you wish to see Jessie to-night? She has had convulsions during the day, and may not live until morning."

She looked up at his grave, noble countenance, and her lips fluttered as she answered, huskily,—

Digitized by Google

"I can do nothing for her, and why should I see her die?"

"To whose care was she committed by her dying mother?"

"To mine."

"Have you faithfully kept the sacred trust?"

"I did all that I could until Miss Jane placed her in the asylum."

"Does your conscience acquit you?"

She silently dropped her face in her hands, and for some seconds he watched her anxiously.

"Have you and Janet decided what shall be done with Stanley?"

"No; the longer I ponder the matter, the more confused my mind becomes."

"Will you leave it in my hands, and abide by my decision?"

"Yes, gladly."

"You promise to be satisfied with any course upon which I may resolve?"

Looking up quickly, she exclaimed,—

"Oh, yes; I trust you, fully. Do what you think best."

Dr. Grey put his hand under Stanley's chin, and, lifting his face, examined his countenance and felt his pulse.

"He is only frightened and fatigued. Put him to bed at once in your room, and then let me take you to see little Jessie. If you fail to go, you might reproach yourself in coming years."

It was nine o'clock when the carriage stopped at the door of the Asylum, and Salome and Dr. Grey went up to the "Infirmary," where the faithful matron sat beside one of the little beds, watching the deep slumber of the flushed and exhausted sleeper.

The disease had almost spent its force, the crisis was passed, and the attending physician had pronounced the patient much better; still, when Salome stooped to kiss her sister, the matron held her back, assuring her that perfect quiet was essential for her recovery. Kneeling there beside the motherless girl, Salome noted the changes that time and suffering had wrought on the delicate features; and, as she listened to the quick, irregular breathing, the fountain of tenderness was suddenly unsealed in her own nature,

Digitized by Google

and she put out her arms, yearning to clasp Jessie to her heart. So strong were her emotions, so keen was her regret for past indifference and neglect, that she lost all self-control, and, unable to check her passionate weeping, Dr. Grey led her from the room, promising to bring her again when the sick child was sufficiently strong to bear the interview.

During the ride homeward he made no effort to divert her thoughts or relieve her anxiety, knowing that although severe it was a healthful regimen for her long indurated heart, and was the *rénaissance* of her better nature.

When they arrived at home, the moon was shining bright and full, and, as they waited on the gallery for a servant to open the door, Dr. Grey drew most favorable auguries from the chastened, blanched face, with its humbled and grieved expression.

"Salome, I shall for the present keep Stanley here; and, until I can make some satisfactory arrangement with reference to his education, I would be glad to have you hear his recitations every day. Have you the requisite leisure to superintend his lessons?"

"Yes, sir. I have not deserved this kindness from you, Dr. Grey; but I thank you, from my inmost heart. You are good enough to forgive my many offences, and I shall not soon forget it."

"Salome, you owe me no gratitude, but there is much for which you should go down on your knees and fervently thank your merciful God. My young friend, will you do this?"

He extended his hand, and, unable to utter a word, Salome gave him hers, for a second only, and hastened to her own room, where Stanley's fair face lay in the golden moonlight, radiant with happy dreams of white pigeons and pet lambs.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

"DON'T strangle me, Jessie! Put down your arms, and listen to me. Sobbing will not mend matters, and you might as well make up your mind to be patient. Of course I should like to take you with me, if I had a home; but, as I told you just now, we are so poor that we must live where we can, not where we prefer. Because I wear nice pretty clothes do you suppose I have a pocketful of money? I have not a cent to buy even a loaf of bread, and I can't ask Miss Jane to take care of you as well as of Stanley and myself. Poor little thing, don't cry so! I know you are lonely here without Stanley, but it can't be helped. Jessie, don't you see that it can not be helped?"

"I don't eat so very much, and I could sleep with Buddie and wouldn't be in the way,—and I can wear my old clothes Oh, please, Salome! I will die if you leave me here."

"You will do no such thing; you are getting well as fast as possible. Crying never kills people,—it only makes their heads ache, and their eyes red and ugly. See here, if you don't stop all this, I shall quit coming to see you! Do you hear what I say?"

The only reply was a fresh sob, which the child strove to smother by hiding her face in Salome's lap.

The matron, who sat by the open window, looked up from the button-hole she was working, and, clearing her throat, said,—

"Better let her have her cry out,—that is the surest cure for such troubles as hers. She was always manageable and good enough until Stanley ran away, and since then she does nothing but mope and bite her finger-nails. Cry away, Jessie, and have done with it. Ah, miss, the saddest feature about Asylums is the separation of families; and if the matron had a heart of stone it would melt sometimes at sight of these little motherless things clinging to each other. I'm sure I have shed a gallon of tears since I came here. It is a fearful responsibility to take charge of an institution like this, for if I try to make the children re-

Digitized by Google

spect my authority, and behave themselves properly, outsiders, especially the neighbors, say I am too severe; and if I let them frolic and romp and make as much din and uproar as they like, why, then the same folks scandalize me and the managers, and say there is no sort of discipline maintained. I verily believe, miss, that if an angel came down from heaven to matronize those children, before six months elapsed all the godliness would be worried out of her soul by the slanders of the public and the squabbles of the children. Now I don't profess to be an angel, but I do claim a conscience, and God knows I make it a rule to treat these orphans exactly as I treated my own and only child, whom I buried three years ago. Do you suppose that any woman who has laid her first-born in its coffin could be brutal enough to maltreat poor little motherless lambs? I don't deny that sometimes I am compelled to punish them, for it is as much my duty to whip them for bad conduct as to see that their meals are properly cooked and their clothes kept in order. Am I to let them grow up thieves and liars? Must I stand by and see them pull out each other's hair and bite off one another's ears?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Collins. You must preserve some discipline."

"Must I? Well, miss, I will show you how beautifully that sounds and how poorly it works. There is your brother Stanley (I mean no offence, miss, but special cases explain better than generalities),— there's your brother Stanley, who ran away — for what?"

"Because he was homesick and wanted to see me."

"No such thing, begging your pardon. Perhaps he told you that, but remember there are always two sides to every tale. The truth of the matter is just this: Stanley has an ugly habit of cursing, which I will not tolerate; and, twice when I heard him swearing at the other children, I shamed him well and slapped him soundly. Last week I told him and Joe Clark to shell a basket of peas, while the cook was making some gingerbread for them, and before I was out of the room they commenced quarrelling. They raised such an uproar that I came back and

Digitized by Google

saw the whole fray. Stanley cursed Joe, who expostulated and tried to pacify him, and when he finally threatened to tell me that Stanley was cursing again, your brother snatched a hatchet that was lying on the dresser and swore he would kill him if he did. He aimed a blow at Joe's head, but slipped on the pea-hulls, and the hatchet struck the boy's right foot, cutting off one of his toes. Now what would you have done, under the circumstances,—allowed the children to be tomahawked in that style? You say I must have discipline. Well, miss, I tried to 'discipline' Stanley's wickedness out of him by giving him a whipping, and the end of the matter was that he ran away that afternoon. That is not the worst of it,—for the children all know the facts, and since they find that Stanley Owen can run away and be sustained in his disobedience, of course it tends to demoralize them. So I say that if I do my duty I am lashed by the tongues of people who know nothing of the circumstances; and if I fail to perform my duty I am lashed by my own conscience,—and between the two I have a sorrowful time; for I declare to you, miss, that Stephen's martyrdom was a small affair in comparison with what I pass through every week. I love the children and try to be kind to them, but I can't have them cursing and swearing like sailors, and scalping each other. I must either raise them like Christians, or resign my situation to some one who is 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' It is all very fine to talk of 'proper discipline' in charitable institutions; but, miss, in the name of common sense, how can I get along unless the friends of the children sustain me? Did you punish Stanley, and send him back? On the contrary, you countenanced his bad conduct and kept him with you, and it is perfectly natural that little Jessie here should be dissatisfied and anxious to join him. I can't scold her, for I know she misses her brother, who was always very tender and considerate in his treatment of her."

"I appreciate the difficulties which surround you, and believe that you are conscientiously striving to do your duty towards these children; but I knew that if I compelled Stanley to return it would augment instead of correcting the mischief."

At this juncture the matron was summoned from the room,

Digitized by Google

and, during the silence that ensued, Jessie climbed into her sister's lap, wound her thin arms around her neck, and softly rubbed her pale cheek against the polished rosy face, where perplexity and annoyance were legibly written.

"Salome, don't you love me a little?"

"Of course I do; Jessie, don't be so foolish."

"Please let me go with you and Stanley."

"Do you want to starve,—you poor silly thing?"

"Yes; I would rather starve with Buddie than stay here by myself."

"I want to hear no more of such nonsense. You have not tried starving, and you are too young to know what is really for your good. Now, listen to me. At present I am obliged to leave you here,—come, don't begin crying again; but, if you will be a good girl and try not to fret over what cannot be helped, I promise you that just as soon as I can possibly support you I will take you to live with me."

"How long must I wait?"

"Until I make money enough to feed and clothe you."

"Can't you guess when you can come for me?"

"No, for as yet I know not how I can earn a dollar; but, if you will be patient, I promise to work hard for you and Stanley."

"I will be good. Salome, I have saved a quarter of a dollar that the doctor gave me when I was sick,—because I let the blister stay on my side a half hour longer; and I thought I would send it to Buddie, to buy him some marbles or a kite; but I reckon I had better give it to you to help us get a house."

She drew from her pocket a green calico bag, and, emptying the contents into her hand, picked out from among brass buttons and bits of broken glass a silver coin, which she held up triumphantly.

"No, Jessie,—keep it. Stanley has plenty of playthings, and you may need it. Besides, your quarter would not go far, and I don't want it. Good-bye, little darling. Try to give Mrs. Collins no trouble, and recollect that when I promise you anything I shall be sure to keep my word."

Digitized by Google

Salome drew the child's head to her shoulder, and, as she bent over and kissed the sweet, pure lips, Jessie whispered, "When we say our prayers to-night, we will ask God to send us some money to buy a home, won't we? You know he made the birds feed Elijah."

"But we are not prophets, and ravens are not flying about with bags of money under their wings."

"We do not know what God can do, and if we are only good, He is as much bound to take care of us as of Elijah. He made the sky rain manna and partridges for the starving people in the desert, and He is as much our God as if we came out from Egypt under Moses. I know God will help us, if we ask Him. I am sure of it; for last week I lost Mrs. Collins' bunch of keys, and, when I could not find them anywhere, I prayed to God to help me, and, sure enough, I remembered I left them in the dairy where I was churning."

Jessie's countenance was radiant with hope and faith, which her sister could not share, yet felt unwilling to destroy; and, checking the heavy sigh that rose from her oppressed heart, she hastily quitted the house.

In the midst of confused and perturbed reflections, rose like some lonely rock-based beacon in boiling waves her sacred promise to the trusting child, and ingenuity was racked to devise some means for its prompt fulfilment. Consanguinity began to urge its claim vehemently, and long dormant tenderness pleaded piteously for exiled idols.

"If I were only a Christian, like Dr. Grey! His faith, like strong wings, bears him high above all sloughs of despond, all morasses of moodiness. People cannot successfully or profitably serve two masters. That is eminently true; not because it is scriptural, but *vice versa;* because it is so obviously true it could not escape a place in the Bible. Half work pays poor wages, and it is not surprising that neither God nor Mammon will patiently submit to it. I suppose the time has come when I must bargain myself to one or the other; for, hitherto, I have declared in favor of neither. I am not altogether sanctified, nor yet desperately wicked, but I hate Satan, who ruined my father,

Digitized by Google

infinitely more than I dislike the restrictions of religion. I owe him a grudge for all the shame and suffering of my childhood,—which, if God did not interfere to prevent, at least there is strong presumptive evidence that he took no pleasure in witnessing. I don't suppose I have any faith; I scarcely know what it means; but perhaps if I try to serve God instead of myself, it will come to me as it came to Paul and Thomas. I wonder whether mere abstract love of righteousness and of the Lord drives half as many persons into Christian churches as the fear of eternal perdition. I don't deny that I am afraid of Satan, for if he contrives to smuggle so much sin and sorrow into this world what must his own kingdom be? If there be any truth in the tradition that every human being is afflicted by some besetting sin that crouches at the door of the soul, lying in ambush to destroy it, then my own 'Dweller of the Threshold,' is love of mine ease. Time was when I would have bartered my eternal heritage for a good-sized mess of earthly pottage, provided only it was well spiced and garnished; but to-day I have no inclination to be swindled like Esau. Idleness has well-nigh ruined me, so I shall take industry by the horns, and laying thereon all my sins of indolence, drive it before me as the Jews drove Apopompœus."

She walked on in the direction of the town, turning her head neither to right nor left, and keeping her eyes fixed on the blue air before her, where imagination built a home, through whose spacious halls Stanley and Jessie sported at will. On the principal street stood a fashionable dress-making and millinery establishment, and thither Salome bent her steps, resolved that the sun should not set without having witnessed some effort to redeem the pledge given to Jessie.

Panoplied in Miss Jane's patronage, she demanded and obtained admission to the inner apartment of this Temple of Fashion, where presided the Pythoness whose oracular utterances swayed *le beau monde.*

What passed between the two never transpired, even among the apprentices that thronged the adjoining room; but when

Digitized by Google

Salome left the house she carried under her arm a large oundle which furnished work for the ensuing fortnight.

Evening shadows overtook her, while yet a mile distant from home, and as she passed a small cottage, where candle-light flared through the open window, she saw Dr. Grey standing beside the bed, on which, doubtless, lay some sufferer.

Ere many moments had elapsed, she heard his well known footstep on the rocky road, and involuntarily paused to greet him.

"What called you to old Mrs. Peterson's?"

"Her youngest grandchild is very ill with brain fever; so ill that I shall return and sit up with him to-night."

"I was not aware that physicians condescended to act as mere nurses, — to execute their own orders."

"Then I fear you have formed a very low estimate of the sacred responsibilities of my profession, or of the characters of those who represent it. The true physician combines the offices of surgeon, doctor, nurse, and friend."

"Mrs. Peterson is almost destitute, and to a great extent dependent on charity; consequently you need not expect to collect any fee."

"Knowing her poverty, I attend the family gratuitously."

"Is not your charity-list a very long one?"

"Could I divest myself of sympathy with the sufferings of those who compose it I would not curtail it one iota; for I feel like Boerhaave, who once said, 'My poor are my best patients; God pays for them.'"

"Then, after all, you are actuated merely by selfishness, and remit payments in earthly dross, — in 'filthy lucre,' — in order to collect your fees in a better currency, where thieves do not break through nor steal?"

"'He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoreth Him, hath mercy on the poor.' If a tinge of selfishness mingle with the hope of future reward, it will be forgiven, I trust, by the great Physician, who, in sublimating human nature, seized upon its selfish elements as powerful agencies in the regeneration of mankind. An abstract worship

Digitized by Google

of virtue is scarcely possible, while humanity is clothed with clay; and I am not unwilling to confess that hope of eternal compensation influences my conduct in many respects. If this be indeed only subtle selfishness, at least we shall be pardoned by Him who promised to prepare a place in the Father's mansion for those who follow His footsteps among the poor."

She looked up at him, with a puzzled, searching expression, that arrested his attention, and exclaimed, —

"How singularly honest you are! I believe I could have faith if there were more like you."

"Faith in what?"

"In the nobility of my race, — in the possibility of my own improvement, — in the watchful providence of God."

"Salome, there is much sound philosophy in the eighty-seventh and eighty-ninth maxims of cynical Rochefoucauld, 'It is more disgraceful to distrust one's friends than to be deceived by them. Our mistrust justifies the deceit of others.' My opportunities have been favorable for studying various classes of men, and my own experience corroborates the truth of Montaigne's sagacious remark, 'Confidence in another man's virtue is no slight evidence of a man's own.' Try to cultivate trust in your fellow creatures, and the bare show of faith will sometimes create worth."

"Did Christ's show of confidence in Judas save him from betrayal?"

"Let us hope that he was the prototype of a very limited class. You must not expect to find mankind divided into two great castes — one all angels, the other comprising hopeless demons. On the contrary, noble and most ignoble impulses alternately sway the actions and thoughts of the majority of our race; and the saint of to-day is not unfrequently tempted to become the fiend of to-morrow. Remember that the conflict with sinful promptings begins in the cradle — ends only in the coffin, — and try to be more charitable in your judgments."

They walked a few yards in silence, and at length Salome asked, —

"Were you not kept up all of last night?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes; I was obliged to ride fifteen miles to set a dislocated shoulder."

"Then you must be exhausted from fatigue, and unfit for watching to-night. Will you not allow me to relieve you, and take charge of Mrs. Peterson's grandchild? I admit I am very ignorant; but I will faithfully follow your directions, and I think you may venture to trust me."

Confusion flushed her face as she made this proposition, but in the pale, pearly lustre of the summer starlight, it was not visible.

"Thank you heartily, Salome. I could implicitly trust your intentions, but the case is almost hopeless, and I fear you are too inexperienced to render it safe for me to commit the child to your care. I appreciate your kindness, but am too much interested in the boy to leave him when the disease is at its crisis, and a cup of coffee will strengthen me for the vigil. You have been to the Asylum this afternoon; tell me something about little Jessie."

"She is still rather pale, but otherwise seems quite well again. Of course she is dissatisfied since Stanley has left, and thinks she ought to be allowed to follow his example; but I finally persuaded her to remain there patiently, at least for the present. It is well that the poor have their sensibilities blunted early in life, for they are spared many sorrows that afflict those who are pampered by fortune and rendered morbidly sensitive by years of indulgence and prosperity."

A metallic ring had crept into her voice, hardening it, and although he could not distinctly see her countenance, he knew that the words came through set teeth.

"Salome, I hope that I misunderstand you."

"No; unfortunately, you thoroughly comprehend me. Dr. Grey, were you situated precisely as I find myself, do you suppose you would feel your degradation as little as I seem to do? Do you think you would relish the bread of charity as keenly as one, who, for courtesy's sake, shall be nameless? Could you calmly stand by, and with utter *sang froid* see your brothers and sisters — your own flesh and blood — drift on

Digitized by Google

every chance wave, like some sodden crust or withered weed on a stormy, treacherous sea? Would not your family pride bleed and die, and your self-respect wail and shrivel and expire?"

"You have so grossly exaggerated and overcolored your picture that I recognize little likeness to reality."

"I neither gloze nor mask; I simply front the facts, which are, briefly, that you were nurtured in independence and trained to abhor the crumbs that fall from other people's tables, while all heroic aspirations and proud chivalric dreams were fed by the milk that nourished you; whereas, I grew up in the wan, sickly atmosphere of penury; glad to grasp the crust that chance offered; taught to consider the bread of dependence precious as ambrosia; willing to forget family ties that were fraught only with humiliation and wretchedness; coveting bounty that I had not sufficient ambition to merit; and eager to live on charity, as long as it could be coaxed, hoodwinked, or scourged into supporting me comfortably. Yesterday I read a sentence that might have been written for me, so felicitously does it photograph me, 'Temperament is a fate oftentimes, from whose jurisdiction its victims hardly escape, but do its bidding herein, be it murder or martyrdom. Virtues and crimes are mixed in one's cup of nativity, with the lesser or larger margin of choice. *Blood is a destiny.*' You, Ulpian Grey, are what you are because your father was a gentleman, and all your surroundings were luxurious and refined; and I, the miller's child, am what you see me because my father was coarse and brutal; because my body and soul struggled with staring starvation,—physical, mental, and moral. Be just, and remember these things when you are tempted to despise me as a pitiable, spiritless parasite."

"My little friend, you have most unnecessarily tortured yourself, and grieved and mortified me. Have I ever treated you with contempt or disrespect?"

"You evidently pity me, and compassion is about as welcome to my feelings as a vitriol bath to fresh wounds."

"Are you not conscious of having more than once acted in such a manner as to necessitate my compassion?"

Digitized by Google

She was silent for some moments; but as they entered the avenue, she said, impetuously,—

"I want you to respect me."

"If you respect yourself and merit my good opinion, I shall not withhold it. But of one thing let me assure you; my standard of womanly delicacy, nobility, gentleness, and Christian faith is very exalted; and I cannot and will not lower it, even to meet the requirements of those who claim my friendship. Thoroughly cognizant of my opinions concerning several subjects, you have more than once, premeditatedly and obtrusively, outraged them, and while I can and do most cordially overlook the offence, you should not deem it possible for me to entertain a very lofty estimate of the offender. When I came home you took such extraordinary pains to convince me that not a single noble aspiration actuated you that I confess you almost succeeded in your aim; but, Salome, I hope you are far more generous than you deign to prove yourself, and I promise you my earnest respect shall not lag behind,—shall promptly keep pace with your deserts. You can, if you so determine, make yourself an attractive, brilliant, noble woman; an ornament—and, better still—a useful, honored member of society; but the faults of your character are grave, and only prayer and conscientious, persistent efforts can entirely correct them. I am neither so unreasonable nor so unjust as to hold you accountable for circumstances beyond your control; and, while I warmly sympathize with all your sorrows, I know that you are still sufficiently young to rectify the unfortunate warping that your nature received in its mournful early years. To ask me to respect you is as idle and useless and impotent as the soft murmur of this June breeze in the elm boughs above us; but you can command my perfect confidence and friendship solely on condition that you merit it. Salome, something very unusual has influenced you to-day, forcing you to throw aside the rubbish that you patiently piled over your better self until it was effectually concealed; and, if you are willing to be frank with me, I should be glad to know what has so healthfully affected you. I believe I can guess: has not little Jessie wooed and

Digitized by Google

won her sister's heart, melting all its icy selfishness and warming its holiest recesses?"

At this moment Stanley bounded down the steps to meet them, and, bending over to receive his kiss and embrace, Salome gladly eluded a reply. That night, after she had taught her brother his lessons for the next day and made him repeat the prayer learned in the dormitory of the Asylum, — when she had read Miss Jane to sleep and seen the doctor set out on his mission of mercy, she brightened the lamplight in her own room, and, opening the parcel, drew out and commenced the dainty embroidery which she had promised should be completed at an early day.

The night was warm, but the sea-breeze sang a lullaby in the trees that peeped in at her window, and now and then a strong gust blew the flame almost to the top of the lamp-chimney. Stanley slept soundly in his trundle-bed, occasionally startling her by half-uttered exclamations, as in his dreams he chased rabbits or found partridge-eggs. Oblivious of passing hours, and profoundly immersed in speculations concerning her future, the girl sewed on, working scallop after scallop, and flower after flower, in the gossamer cambric between her slender fingers. Stars that looked upon her early in the night had gone down into blue abysms below the horizon, and the midnight song of a mocking-bird, swinging in a lemon-tree beneath her window, had long since hushed itself with the chirp of crickets and gossip of the katydids.

A tap on the facing of her open door finally aroused her, and she hastily attempted to hide her work, as Dr. Grey asked, —

"What keeps you up so late? Are you dressing a doll for Jessie?"

"What brings you home so early? Is your patient better?"

"Yes; in one sense he is certainly better; for, free from all pain, he rests with his God."

"What time is it?"

"Half-past three. Little Charles died about an hour ago, and, as I shall be very busy to-morrow, I came upstairs to ask if you will oblige me by going over to Mrs. Peterson's and remain

Digitized by Google

ing with her until the neighbors assemble in the morning. It is an unpleasant duty, and unless you are perfectly willing I will not request you to perform it."

"Certainly, sir; I will go at once. Why should I hesitate?"

"Come down as soon as you are ready, and I will make Harrison drive you over in my buggy. As it is only a mile I walked home."

When she stood before him, waiting for the servant to adjust some portion of the harness, Dr. Grey wrapped her shawl more closely around her, and said,—

"What new freak keeps you awake till four o'clock?"

"It is no freak, but the beginning of a settled purpose that reaches in numberless ramifications through all my coming years. It does not concern you, so ask me no more. Good-night. I suppose I ought to tender you my thanks for deeming me worthy of this melancholy mission; and if so, pray be pleased to accept them."

CHAPTER V.

"JANE, have you heard that we shall soon have some new neighbors at 'Solitude'?"

"No; who is brave enough to settle there?"

"Mrs. Gerome, a widow, has purchased and refitted the house, preparatory to making it her home."

"Do you suppose she knows the history of its former owners?"

"Probably not, as she has never seen the place. The purchase was made some months since by her agent, who stated that she was in Europe."

"Ulpian, I am sorry that the house will again be occupied, for some mournful fatality seems to have attended all who ever resided there; and I have been told that the last proprietor changed the name from 'Solitude' to 'Bochim.'"

Digitized by Google

"You must not indulge such superstitious vagaries, my dear, wise Janet. The age of hobgoblins, haunted houses, and supernatural influences has passed away with the marvels of alchemy and the weird myths of Rosicrucianism. Because many deaths have occurred at that place, and the residents were consequently plunged in gloom, you must not rashly impute eldritch influences to the atmosphere surrounding it. Knowing its ghostly celebrity, I have investigated the grounds of existing prejudice, and find that of the ten persons who have died there during the last fifteen years, three deaths were from hereditary consumption, one from dropsy, two from paralysis, one from epilepsy, one from brain-fever, one from drowning, and the last from a fall that broke the victim's neck. Were these attributable to any local cause, the results would certainly not have proved so diverse."

"Call it superstition, or what you will, no amount of coaxing, argument, or ridicule, no imaginable inducement could prevail on me to live there, — even if the house were floored with gold and roofed with silver. It is the gloomiest-looking place this side of Golgotha, and I would as soon crawl into a coffin for an afternoon nap as spend a night there."

"Your imagination invests it with a degree of gloom which is adventitious, and referable solely to painful associations; for intrinsically the situation is picturesque and beautiful, and the grounds have been arranged with consummate taste. This morning I noticed a quantity of rare and very superb lilies clustered in a corner of the *parterre*."

"Pray, what called you there?"

"A workman engaged in repairing some portion of the roof, slipped on the slate and broke his arm; consequently, they sent for me."

"Just what he might have expected. I tell you something happens to everybody who ever sleeps there."

"Do you suppose there is a squad of malicious sprites hovering in ambush to swoop upon all new-comers, and not only fracture limbs, but scatter to right and left paralysis, epilepsy, and other diseases? From your rueful countenance a stranger

Digitized by Google

might infer that Pandora's box had just been opened at 'Bochim,' and that the very air was thick with miasma and maledictions."

"Oh, laugh on if you choose at my old-fashioned whims and superstition; but, mark my words, that place will prove a curse to whoever buys it and settles there! Has Mrs. Gerome a family?"

"I believe I heard that she had no children, but I really know little about her except that she must be a woman of unusually refined and cultivated tastes, as the pictures, books, and various articles of vertu that have preceded her seem to indicate much critical and artistic acumen. The entire building has been refitted in exceedingly handsome style, and the upholsterer who was arranging the furniture told me it had been purchased in Europe."

"When is Mrs. Gerome expected?"

"During the present week."

"What aged person is she?"

"Indeed, my dear, curious Janet, I have asked no questions and formed no conjectures; but I trust your baleful prognostications will find no fulfilment in her case."

"Ulpian, I had some very fashionable visitors to-day, who manifested an extraordinary interest in your past, present, and future. Mrs. Channing and her two lovely daughters spent the morning here, and left an invitation for you to attend a party at their house next Thursday evening. Miss Adelaide went into ecstasies over that portrait in which you wore your uniform, and asked numberless questions about you; among others, whether you were still heart-whole, or whether you had suffered some great disappointment early in life which kept you a bachelor. What do you suppose she said when I told her that you had never had a love-scrape in your life?"

"Of course she impugned the statement, which, to a young lady famed for flirtations, must indeed have appeared incredible."

"On the contrary, she declared that the woman who succeeded in captivating you would achieve a triumph more difficult and

Digitized by Google

more desirable than the victory of the Nile or of Trafalgar. I was tempted to ask her if she might be considered the ambitious Nelson, but of course politeness forbade. Ulpian, she is the prettiest creature I ever looked at."

"Yes, as pretty as mere healthy flesh can be without the sublimation and radiance of an indwelling soul. There is nothing which impresses me so mournfully as the sight of a beautiful, frivolous, unscrupulous woman, who immolates all that is truly feminine in her character upon the shrine of swollen vanity; and whose career from cradle to grave is as utterly aimless and useless as that of some gaudy, flaunting ephemeron of the tropics. Such women act as extinguishers upon the feeble, flickering flame of chivalry, which modern degeneracy in manners and morals has almost smothered."

His tone and countenance evinced more contempt than Salome had known him to express on any former occasion, and, glancing at his clear, steady, grave blue eyes, she said to herself, —

"At least he will never strike his colors to Admiral Adelaide Channing, and I should dislike to occupy her place in his estimation."

"My dear boy, you must not speak in such ungrateful terms of my beautiful visitor, who certainly has some serious design on your heart, if I may judge from the very extravagant praise she lavished upon you. I daresay she is a very nice, sweet girl, and you know you told me once that if you should ever marry your wife must be a beauty, else you could not love her."

"Very true, Janet, and I have no intention of retracting or diminishing my rigid requirements, but my definition of beauty includes more than mere physical perfection, — than satin skin, pearl-tinted, fine eyes, faultless teeth, abundant silky tresses, and rounded figure. It demands that the heart whose blood paints lips and cheek, shall be pure, generous, and holy; that the soul which looks out at me from lustrous eyes shall be consecrated to another deity than Fashion, — shall be as full of magnanimity, and strength, and peace, as a harp is of melody; my beauty means meekness, faith, sanctity, and exacts mental, moral, and material excellence. Rest assured, my dear, sage counsellor,

Digitized by Google

that if ever I bring a wife to my hearthstone I will have selected her in obedience to the advice of Joubert, who admonished us, 'We should choose for a wife only the woman we would choose for a friend, were she a man.'"

"You expect too much; you will never find your perfect ideal walking in flesh."

"I will content myself with nothing less — I promise you that."

"Oh, no doubt you will believe that the woman you marry is all that you dream or wish; but some fine morning you will present me with a sister as full of foibles and vanities and frailties as any other spoiled and cunning daughter of Eve. Of course every bridegroom classes as 'perfect' the blushing, trembling young thing who peeps shyly at him from under a tulle veil and an orange wreath; but, take my word for it, there is a spice of Delilah in every pretty girl, and the credulity of Samson slumbers in all lovers. Nevertheless, Ulpian, I would sooner see you in bondage to a pair of white hands and hazel eyes, — would rather know that like all your race you were utterly humbugged — hoodwinked — by some fair-browed belle, whose low-voice rippled over pouting pink lips, than have you live always alone, a confirmed old bachelor. After all, I doubt whether you have really never had a sweetheart, for every schoolboy swears allegiance to some yellow-haired divinity in ruffled muslin aprons."

Dr. Grey laid his hand gently on the shrivelled fingers that were busily engaged in shelling some seed-beans, and answered, jocosely, —

"Have I not often told you, that my dear, old, patient sister Janet, is my only lady-love?"

"And your silly old Janet is not such an arrant fool as to believe any such nonsense, — especially when she remembers that from time immemorial sailors have had sweethearts in every port, and that her spoiled pet of a brother is no exception to his race or his profession."

He laughed, and smoothed her grizzled hair.

"Since my sapient sister is so curious, I will confess that once — and only once in my life — I was in dire danger of falling

Digitized by Google

most desperately in love. The frigate was coaling at Palermo, and I went ashore. One afternoon, in sauntering through the orange and lemon groves which render its environs so inviting, I caught a glimpse of a countenance so serene, so indescribably lovely, that for an instant I was disposed to believe I had encountered the beatific spirit of St. Rosalie herself. The face was that of a woman apparently about eighteen years old, who evidently ranked among Sicilian aristocrats, and whose elegant attire enhanced her beauty. I followed, at a respectful distance, until she entered the garden of an adjacent convent and fell on her knees before a marble altar, where burned a lamp at the feet of a statue of the Virgin; and no painting in Europe stamped itself so indelibly on my memory as the picture of that beautiful votary. Her delicate hands were crossed over her heart, — her large, liquid, black eyes, raised in adoration, — her full, crimson lips parted as she repeated the '*Ave Maria*' in the most musical voice I ever heard. Just above the purplish folds of her abundant hair drooped pomegranate boughs all aflame with scarlet blooms that fell upon her head like tongues of fire, as the wind sprang from the blue hollows of the Mediterranean and shook the grove. The sun was going swiftly down behind the stone turrets of a monastery that crowned a distant hill, and the last rays wove an aureola around my kneeling saint, who, doubtless, aware of the effect of her graceful attitudinizing, seemed in no haste to conclude her devotions. As I recall the charming tableau, those lines wherein Buchanan sought to photograph the picturesqueness of the Digentia, float up from some sympathetic cell of memory, —

'Could you look at the leaves of yonder tree, —
The wind is stirring them, as the sun is stirring me!
The woolly clouds move quiet and slow
In the pale blue calm of the tranquil skies,
And their shades that run on the grass below
Leave purple dreams in the violet's eyes!
The vine droops over my head with bright
Clusters of purple and green, — the rose
Breaks her heart on the air; and the orange glows
Like golden lamps in an emerald night.'

Digitized by Google

My Sicilian Siren finally disappeared in a gloomy arched-way leading into the convent, and I returned to the hotel to dream of her until the morning sunshine once more bathed Conca D'Oro in splendor, — when I instituted a search for the name and residence of my inamorata. Six hours of enthusiastic investigation yielded me the coveted information, but imagine the profound despair in which I was plunged when I ascertained from her own smiling lips that she was a happy wife and the proud mother of two beautiful children. As she rose to present her swarthy husband, I bowed myself out and took refuge aboard ship. Here ends the recital of the first and last bit of romance that ever threw its rosy tinge over the quiet life of your staid and humble brother — Ulpian Grey, M.D."

"Ah, my dear sailor boy, I am afraid thirty-five years of experience have rendered you too wary to be caught by such chaff as pretty girls sprinkle along your path! I should be glad to see your bride enter this door before I am carried out feet foremost to my final rest by Enoch's side."

"Do not despair of me, dear Jane, for I am not exactly Methuselah's rival; and comfort yourself by recollecting that Lessing was forty years old when he first loved the only woman for whom he ever entertained an affection — his devoted Eva König."

Dr. Grey bent over his sister's easy-chair, and, taking her thin, sallow face tenderly in his soft palms, kissed the sunken cheeks — the wrinkled forehead; and then, laying her head gently back upon its cushions, entered his buggy and drove to his office.

"Salome, what makes you look so moody? There are as many furrows on your brow as lines in a spider's web, and your lips are drawn in as if you had dined on green persimmons. Child, what is the matter?"

Miss Jane lifted her spectacles from her nose, and eyed the orphan, anxiously.

"I am very sorry to hear that 'Solitude' will be filled once more with people, and bustle, and din. It is the nearest point where we can reach the beach, and I have enjoyed many quiet

Digitized by Google

strolls under its grand, old, solemn trees. If haunted at all, it is by Dryads and Hamadryads, and I like the babble of their leaves infinitely better than the strife of human tongues. Miss Jane, if I were only a pagan!"

"I am not very sure that you are not," sighed the invalid.

"Nor I. I have lost my place,—I am behind my time in this world by at least twenty centuries, and ought to have lived in the jovial age of fauns and satyrs, when groves were sacred for other reasons than the high price of wood,—when gods and goddesses were abundant as blackberries, and at the beck and call of every miserable wretch who chose to propitiate them by offering a flask of wine, a bunch of turnips, a litter of puppies, or a basket of olives. Hesiod and Homer understood human nature infinitely better than Paul and Luther."

"Salome, you are growing shockingly irreverent and wicked."

"No, madam,—begging your pardon. I am only desperately honest in wishing that my salvation and future felicity could be secured beyond all peradventure, by a sacrifice of oat-cakes, or white doves, or black cats, instead of a drab-colored life of prayer, penance, purity, and patience. I don't deny that I would rather spend my days in watching the gorgeous pageant of the *Panathenaea*, or chanting dithyrambics to insure a fine vintage, or even offering a *Taigheirm*, than in running neck and neck with Lucifer for the kingdom of heaven. I love kids, and fawns, and lambs, as well as Landseer; but I should not long hesitate, had I the choice, between flaying their tender flesh in sacrifice and mortifying my own as a devout life requires."

"But what would have become of your poor soul if you had lived in Pagan times?"

"What will become of it under present circumstances, I should be exceedingly glad to know. 'The heathen are a law unto themselves,' and I sometimes wish I had been born a Fejee belle, who lived, was tastefully tattooed, and died without having even dreamed of missionaries,—those officious martyrs who hope to wear a whole constellation on their foreheads as a reward for having been eaten by cannibals, to whom they

Digitized by Google

expounded the unpalatable doctrine that, 'this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.' Moreover, I confess—"

"That is quite sufficient. I have already heard more than I relish of such silly and sacrilegious chat. At least, you might have more prudence and discretion than to hold forth so disgracefully in the hearing of your little brother."

Miss Jane's cheek flushed, and her feeble voice faltered.

"He has fallen fast asleep over the bean-pods; and, even if he had not, how much of the conversation do you imagine he would comprehend? His sole knowledge of Grecian theogony consists of a brief acquaintance with a bottle of pseudo Greek fire which burnt the pocket out of his best pantaloons."

"Salome, you distress me; and, if Ulpian had not left us, you would have kept all such heathenish stuff shut up in your sinful and wayward heart."

"Dr. Grey is no Gorgon, having power to petrify my tongue. I am not afraid of him; and my respect for your feelings is much stronger than my dread of his."

"Hush, child! You are afraid of him, and well you may be. I fear that all your Sabbath-school advantages—all your Christian privileges—have been wofully wasted; and I shall ask Ulpian to talk to you."

"No, thank you, Miss Jane. You may save yourself the trouble, for he has given me over to hardness of heart and 'a reprobate mind,' and his patience is not only 'clean gone forever,' but he has carefully washed his hands of all future interest in my rudderless and drifting soul. Let me speak this once, and henceforth I promise to hold my peace. I do not require to be 'talked to' by anybody,—I only need to be let alone. Sabbath-schools are indisputably excellent things,—and I can testify that they are ponderous ecclesiastical hammers, pounding creeds and catechisms into the mould of memory; but these nurseries of the church nourish and harbor some Satan's imps among their half-fledged saints; and while they certainly accomplish a vast amount of good, they are by no means infallible machines for the manufacture of Christians,—of which fact I stand in melan-

Digitized by Google

choly attestation. I have a vague impression that piety does not grow up in a night, like Jonah's gourd or Jack the Giant-killer's bean-stalk; but is a pure, glittering, spiritual stalactite, built by the slow accretion of dripping tears. Do you suppose that you can successfully train my soul as you have managed my body? — that you can hold my nose and pour a dose of faith down my throat, like ipecac or cod-liver oil? In matters of theology I am no ostrich, and, if you afflict me *ad nauseam* with religious dogmas, you must not wonder that my moral digestion rebels outright. I shall not dispute the fact that in justice to your precepts and example I ought to be a Christian; but, since I am not, I may as well tell you at once and save future trouble, that I can neither be baited into the church like a hawk into a steel-trap, nor scared and driven into it like bees into a hive by the rattling of tin pans and the screaking of horns. Don't look at me so dolefully, dear Miss Jane, as if you had already seen my passport to perdition signed and sealed. You, at least, have done your whole duty, — have set all the articles of orthodoxy, well-flavored and garnished, before me; and, if I am finally lost, my spiritual starvation can never be charged against you in the last balance-sheet. I am not ignorant of the Bible, nor altogether unacquainted with the divers creeds that spring from its pages as thick, as formidable, as ferocious, as the harvest from the dragon's teeth; and, thanking you for all you have taught me, I here undertake to pilot my own soul in this boiling, bellowing sea of life. I doubt whether some of the charts you value will be of any service in my voyage, or whether the beacons by which you steer will save me from the reefs; but, nevertheless, I take the wheel, and, if I wreck my soul, — why, then, I wreck it."

In the magic evening light, which touches all things with a rosy, transitory glamour, the fresh young face with its daintily sculptured lineaments seemed marvellously and surpassingly fair; but, like *morbidezza* marble, hopelessly fixed and chill, and might have served for some image of Eve, when, standing on the boundary of eternal beatitude, she daringly put up her slender womanly fingers to pluck the fatal fruit. Her large, brilliant

Digitized by Google

eyes followed the sinking sun as steadily — as unblinkingly — as an eagle's; but the gleam that rayed out was baleful, presaging storms, as infallibly as that sullen, lurid light, which glares defiantly over helpless earth when to-day's sun falls into the cloudy lap of to-morrow's tempest.

A heavy sigh struggled across Miss Jane's unsteady lips, as, pushing her glasses, she wiped her eyes, and said, slowly, —

"Yes; I am a stupid, unsuspecting old dolt; but I see it all now."

"My ultimate and irremediable ruin?"

"God forbid!"

Salome approached the arm-chair, and, stooping, looked intently at the aged, wan face.

"What is it that you see? Miss Jane, when people stand, as you do, upon the borders of two worlds, the Bygone fades, — the Beyond grows distinct and luminous. Lend me your second sight, to decipher the characters scrawled like fiery serpents over the pall that envelops the future."

"I see nothing but the grim, unmistakeable fact that my little, clinging, dependent child, has, without my knowledge, put away childish things, and suddenly steps before me a wilful, irreverent, graceless woman, as eager to challenge the decrees of the Lord as was complaining Job before the breath of the whirlwind smote and awed him. Some day, Salome, that same voice that startled the old man of Uz will make you bend and tremble and shiver like that acacia yonder, which the wind is toying with before it snaps asunder. When that time comes the clover will feed bees above my gray head, but I trust my soul will be near enough to the great white throne to pray God to have mercy on your wretched spirit, and bring you safely to that blessed haven whither you can never pilot yourself."

Nervous excitement gave unwonted strength to the feeble limbs; and, grasping her crutches, Miss Jane limped into her own room and closed the door after her.

For some moments the girl stood looking out over the lawn, where fading sunshine and deepening shadow made fitful *chiaro-scuro* along the primrose-paved aisles that stretched under the

Digitized by Google

elm arches, — then, raising her fingers as if tracing lines on the soft, gold-dusted atmosphere that surrounded her, she muttered doggedly, —

"Yes; I am at sea! But, if God is just, Miss Jane and I will yet shake hands on that calm, surgeless, crystal sea, shining before the throne. So, now I take the helm and put the head of my precious charge before the wind, and only the Almighty can foresee the result. In His mercy I put my trust. So be it.

'Gray distance hid each shining sail,
By ruthless breezes borne from me;
And lessening, fading, faint, and pale,
My ships went forth to sea.'"

CHAPTER VI.

"MOTHER, I am afraid Mrs. Gerome does not like this place, or the furniture, or something, for she has not spoken a kind word about the house since she came. She looks closely at everything, but says nothing. What do you suppose she thinks?"

Robert Maclean, the gardener at "Solitude," paused abruptly, as his mother pinched his arm sharply and whispered, —

"Whist! There she comes down the azalea walk; and no one likes to stumble upon their own name when they are not expecting the sound or sight of it. No; she has turned off towards the cedars, and does not see us. As to her likes and dislikes, there is nothing this side of heaven that will content her; and you might have known better than to suppose she would be much pleased with anything. No matter what she thinks, she seldom complains, and it is hard to find out her views; but she told me to tell you that she approved all you had done, and thanked you for the pains you have taken to arrange things comfortably."

Digitized by Google

Old Elsie tied the strings of her white muslin cap, and turned her back to the wind that was playing havoc with its freshly fluted frills.

"Mother, I heard her laugh yesterday, for the first time. It was a short, quick, queer little laugh, but it pleased me greatly. The cook had set some duck-eggs under that fine black Spanish hen; and, when they hatched, she marched off with the brood into the fowl-yard, where they made straight for the duck-pool and sailed in. The hen set up such a din and clatter that Mrs. Gerome, who happened to get a glimpse of them, felt sorry for the poor frightened fowl, and tried to drive the little ones out of the water; but, whenever she put her hand towards them to catch the nearest, the whole brood would quack and dive, — and, when she had laughed that one short laugh, she called to me to look after them and went back to the house. You don't know how strangely that laugh sounded."

"Don't I? Speak for yourself, Robert. I have heard her laugh twice, but it was when she was asleep, and it was an uncanny, bitter sound, — about as welcome to my ears as her death-rattle. Last night she did not close her eyes, — did not even undress; and the hall clock was striking three this morning when I heard her open the piano and play one of those dismal, frantic, wailing things she calls 'fugues,' that make the hair rise on my head and every inch of my flesh creep as if a stranger were treading on my grave. When she was a baby, cutting her eye-teeth, she had a spasm; and, seeing her straighten herself out and roll back her eyes till only the white balls showed, I took it for granted she was about to die, and, holding her in my arms, I fell on my knees and prayed that she might be spared. Well, now, Robert, I am sorry I put up that petition, for the Lord knew best; and it would have been a crowning mercy if he had paid no attention to my half-crazy pleadings and taken her home then. What meddling fools we all are! I thought, at that time, it would break my heart to shroud her sweet little body; but ah! I would rather have laid my precious baby in her coffin, with violets under her fingers, than live to see that desperate, unearthly look, come and house itself in her great, solemn,

Digitized by Google

hungry, tormenting eyes, that were once as full of sparkles and merriment as the sky is of stars on a clear, frosty night. My son, we never know what is good for us; for, many times, when we clamor for bread we break our teeth on it; and then, again, when we rage and howl because we think the Lord has dealt out scorpions to us, they prove better than the fish we craved. So, after all, I conclude Christ understood the whole matter when he enjoined upon us to say, 'Thy will be done.'"

The old nurse wiped her eyes with the corner of her black silk apron, and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, crossed her arms comfortably over her broad and ample chest, while Robert busied himself in repotting some choice carnations.

"But, mother, do you really think she will be satisfied to stay here, after travelling so long up and down in the world?"

"How can I tell what she will or will not do? You know very well that she goes to sleep with one set of whims and wakes up with new ones. She catches odd freaks as some people catch diseases. She said yesterday that she had had enough of travel and change, and intended to settle and live and die right here; but that does not prove that I may not receive an order next week to pack her trunks and start to Jericho or Halifax, and I should not think the world was upside down and coming to an end if such an order came before breakfast to-morrow. Poor lamb! My poor lamb! Yonder she comes again. Do you notice how fast she walks, as if the foul fiend were clutching at her skirts or she were trying to get away from herself, — trying to run her restless soul entirely out of her wretched body? Come away, Robert, and let her have all the grounds to herself. She likes best to be alone."

Mother and son walked off in the direction of the stables, and the advancing figure emerged from the dense shade where interlacing limbs roofed one of the winding walks, and paused before the circular stand on which lemon, rose, white, crimson, and variegated carnations, nodded their fringed heads and poured spicy aromas from their velvety chalices.

The face and form of Mrs. Gerome presented a puzzling paradox, in which old age and youth seemed struggling for

Digitized by Google

mastery; and "death in life" found melancholy verification. Tall, slender, and faultlessly made, the perfection of her figure was marred by the unfortunate carriage of her head, which drooped forward so heavily that the chin almost touched her throat and nearly destroyed the harmony of the profile outline. The head itself was nobly rounded, and sternly classic as any well authenticated antique, but it was no marvel that it habitually bowed under the heavy glittering mass of silver hair, which wound in coil after coil and was secured at the back by a comb of carved jet, thickly studded with small silver stars. The extraordinary lustrousness of these waves of gray hair that rippled on her forehead and temples like molten metal, lent a weird and wondrous effect to the straight, regular, rigid features, — daintily cut as those of Pallas, and quite as pallid. The delicate and high arch of the eyebrows was black as ebony, and in conjunction with the long jetty lashes formed a very singular contrast to the shining white tresses, which lay piled like freshly fallen snow-drift above them. The brow was full, round, smooth, and fair as a child's; and more than one azure thread showed the subtle tracery of veins, whose crimson currents left no rosy reflex on the firm, gleaming white flesh, through which they branched.

Beneath that faultless forehead burned unusually large eyes, deep as mountain tarns, and of that pure bluish gray that tolerates no hint of green or yellow rays. The dilated pupils intensified the steel color, and faint violet lines ran out from the iris to meet the central shadows, while above and below the heavy black fringes enhanced their sombre depths, where mournful mysteries seemed to float like corpses just beneath the crystal shroud of ocean waves. The pale, passionless lips, — perfect in their pure curves, but defrauded of the blood which resolutely refused to come to the surface and tint the fine satin skin, — were lined in ciphers that the curious questioned and wondered over, but which few could read and none fully comprehend. The beautiful, frigid mouth, where all sweetness was frozen out to make room for hopelessness and defiance, would have admirably suited some statue of discrowned and smitten

Digitized by Google

Hecuba; and no amount of sighs and sobs, no stormy bursts of grief or fierce invective, could rival the melancholy eloquence of its mute, calm pallor.

The wan face, with its gray globe-like eyes, and the metallic glitter of the prematurely silvered hair, matched in hue the pearl-colored muslin dress which fluttered in the wind; and, standing there, this gray woman of twenty-three looked indeed like Pygmalion's stone darling, —

> "Fair-statured, noble, like an awful thing
> Frozen upon the very verge of life,
> And looking back along eternity
> With rayless eyes that keep the shadow Time."

Her frail, white hands, with their oval nails polished and opalescent, were exceedingly beautiful; and, where the creamy foam of fine lace fell back from the dimpled wrists, quaintly carved jet serpents with blazing diamond eyes coiled around the throbbing threadlike pulses of sullen *sang azure*.

Bending over the carnations, she examined the gorgeous hues, — toyed with their fragile stems, — and then, glancing shyly over her shoulder like a startled fawn half expectant of hounds and hunter, she glided rapidly to an artificial mound crowned with a mouldering mossy plaster image of Ariadne and her pard, and stood surveying her new domain.

"Solitude" filled a semicircular hollow between low wooded hills, which ran down to lave their grassy flanks in the blue brine of the Atlantic, and constituted the horns of a crescent bay, on whose sloping sandy beach the billows broke without barrier.

The old-fashioned brick house — with sharp, peaked roof, turreted chimneys, and gable window looking down in front upon the clumsily clustered columns that supported the arched portico — was built upon a rocky knoll, of which nature laid the foundation and art increased the height; and, around and above it, towered a dense grove of ancient trees that shut out the glare of the sea and effectually screened the mansion from observation. The damp walls were heavily draped with the

Digitized by Google

sombre verdure of ivy, whose ambitious tendrils clambered to the cleft chimney-tops, and peeped impertinently over the broad stone window-sills, whence the indignant housemaid remorselessly sheared them away as often as their encroachments grew perceptible.

In the rear of the house, and toward the west, stretched orchard, vegetable garden, vineyard, and wheat-field, whose rolling green waves seemed almost to break against the ruddy trunks of cedars that clothed the hillside. To the left and north lay low, marshy, meadow land, covered with rank grass and frosted with saline incrustations; while south of the building extended spacious grounds, studded here and there with noble groups of deodars, Norway spruce, and various ornamental shrubs, and bounded by a tall impenetrable hedge of osage orange. Before the house, which faced the ocean and fronted east, the lawn sloped gently down to a terrace surmounted by a granite balustrade; and just beyond, supported by stone piers on the golden sands, stood an octagonal boat-house, built in the Swiss style, with red-tiled roof, and floored with squares of white and black marble, whence a flight of steps led to the little boat chained to one of the rocky piers. Along the entire length of the terrace a line of giant poplars lifted their aged, weather-beaten heads, high above all surrounding objects, — ever on the *qui vive*, looking seaward, — trim and erect as soldiers on dress parade, and defiant of gales that had shorn them of many boughs, and left ghastly scars on their glossy limbs.

Tradition whispered, with bated breath, that in the dim dawn of colonial settlement a rude log hut had been erected here by pirates, who came ashore to bury their ill-gotten booty, and rumors were rife of bloody deeds and midnight orgies, — all of which sprang into more vigorous circulation, when, in laying the foundations of the boat-house piers, an iron pot containing a number of old French and Spanish coins was dug out of the shells and sand.

Melancholy tales of stranded vessels and drowned crews, of a slaver burned to the water's edge to escape capture, and of

Digitized by Google

charred corpses strewn on the beach, thickened the atmosphere of legendary gloom that enveloped the spot, — where the successive demise of several proprietors certainly sanctioned the feeling of dread and superstitious distrust with which it was regarded. That the unenviable celebrity it had attained was referable to local causes generating disease, appeared almost incredible; for, if miasmatic exhalations rose dank and poisonous from the densely shaded humid house, they were promptly dispelled by the strong, invincible ocean-breeze, which tore aside leafy branches and muslin curtains, and wafted all noxious vapors inland.

A committee of medical sages having cautiously examined the place, unanimously averred that its reputed fatality could not justly be ascribed to any topographical causes. Whereupon the popular nerve, which closely connected the community with supernaturaldom, thrilled afresh; and all the calamities, real and imaginary, that had afflicted "Solitude" from a period so remote that "the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," were laid upon the galled shoulders of some red-liveried, sulphur-scented Imp of Abaddon, whose peculiar mission was to haunt the "piratical nest;" and, in lieu of human victims, to addle the eggs, blast the grape crop, and make night hideous with spectral sights and sounds.

To an unprejudiced observer the hills seemed to have gleefully clasped hands and formed a half-circle, shutting the place in for a quiet breezy communion with garrulous ocean, whose waves ran eagerly up the strand to gossip of wrecks and cyclones, with the staid martinet poplars that nodded and murmured assent to all their wild romances.

Such was the pleasant impression produced upon the mind of the lonely woman who now owned it, and who hoped to spend here in seclusion and peace the residue of a life whose radiant dawn had been suddenly swallowed by drab clouds and starless gloom.

The Scotch are proverbially credulous concerning all preternatural influences; and, had Robert Maclean been cognizant of half the ghostly associations attached to the residence which

Digitized by Google

he had selected in compliance with general instructions from his mistress, it is scarcely problematical whether the house would not have remained in the hands of the real-estate broker; but, fortunately for their peace of mind, Elsie and her son were as yet in blissful ignorance of the dismal celebrity of their new home.

Resting her folded hands on the bare shoulders of the Ariadne, which modest lichens and officious wreaths of purple verbena were striving to mantle, Mrs. Gerome scanned the scene before her; and a quick, nervous sigh, that was almost a pant, struggled across her lips.

"Unto this last nook of refuge have I come; and, expecting little, find much. Shut out from the world, locked in with the sea, — no neighbors, no visitors, no news, no gossip, — solitary, shady, cool, and quiet, — surely I can rest here. Forked tongues of scandal can not penetrate through those rock-ribbed hills yonder, nor dart across that defying sea; and neither wail nor wassail of men or women can disturb me more. But how do I know that it will not prove a mocking cheat like Baiæ and Maggiore, or Copais and Cromarty? I have fled in disgust and *ennui* from far lovelier spots than this, and what right have I to suppose that contentment has housed itself as my guest in that old, mossy, brick pile, where mice and wrens run riot? Like Cain and Cartophilus, my curse travels with me, and I no sooner pitch my tent, than lo! the rattle and grin of my skeleton, for which earth is not wide enough to furnish a grave! Well! well! at least I shall not be stared to death here, — shall not be tormented by eye-glasses and sketch-books; can live in that dim, dark, greenish den yonder, unobserved and possibly forgotten, and finally sleep undisturbed in the dank shade of those deodars, with twittering birds overhead and a sobbing sea at my feet. How long — how long before that dreamless slumber will fall upon my heavy lids, — weary with waiting? Only twenty-three yesterday! My God, if I should live to be an old woman! The very thought threatens insanity! Ten — twenty — possibly thirty years ahead of me. No; I could not endure it, — I should go mad, or destroy myself! If I were a delicate woman, if I

Digitized by Google

only had weak lungs or a dropsical heart, or a taint of any hereditary infirmity that would surely curtail my days, I could be tolerably patient, hoping daily for the symptoms to develop themselves. But, unfortunately, though my family all died early, no two members selected the same mode of escape from this bastile of clay; and my flesh is sound, and I am as strong and compact as that granite balustrade, and — ha! ha! — quite as hard. *Au pis aller*, if the burden of life becomes utterly intolerable I can shuffle it off as quickly as did that proud Roman, who, 'when the birds began to sing' in the dawn of a day heralded by tempestuous winds laden with perfume from the vales of Sicily, shut his eyes forever from the warm sparkling Mediterranean billows that broke in the roads of Utica, and pricked the memory of inattentive Azrael with the point of a sword. Neither Phædo, family, nor fame, could coax Cato to respect the prerogative of Atropos; and if he, 'the only free and unconquered man,' quailed and fled before the apparition of numerous advancing years, what marvel that I, who am neither sage nor Roman, should be tempted some fine morning when the birds are sounding *reveille* around my chamber windows, to imitate 'what Cato did, and Addison approved'? After all, what despicable cowards are human hearts, and how much easier to die like Socrates, Seneca, and Zeno, than stagger and groan under the load of hated, torturing years, that are about as welcome to my shoulders as the 'old man of the sea' to Sinbad's! How long? — oh, how long?"

The gloomy gray eyes had kindled into a dull flicker that resembled the fitful, ghostly gleam of sheet lightning, falling through painted windows upon crumbling and defiled altars in some lonely ruined cathedral; and her low, shuddering tones, were full of a hopeless, sneering bitterness, as painfully startling and out of place in a woman's voice as would be the scream of a condor from the irised throats of brooding doves, or the hungry howl of a wolf from the tender lips of unweaned lambs. In the gloaming light of a soft gray sky powdered by a few early stars, stood this desolate gray woman, about whose face and dress there was no stain of color save the blue glitter of a large

Digitized by Google

sapphire ring, curiously cut in the form of a coiled asp, with hooded head erect and brilliant diamond eyes that twinkled with every quiver of the marble-white fingers.

Impatiently she turned her imperial head, when the sound of approaching steps broke the stillness; and her tone was sharp as that of one suddenly roused from deep sleep,—

"Well, Elsie! What is it?"

"Tea, my child, has been waiting half-an-hour."

"Then go and get your share of it. I want none."

"But you ate no dinner to-day. Does your head ache?"

"Oh, no; my heart jealously monopolizes that privilege!"

The old woman sighed audibly, and Mrs. Gerome added,—

"Pray, do not worry yourself about me! When I feel disposed to come in I can find the way to the door. Go and get your supper."

The nurse passed her wrinkled hand over the drab muslin sleeves and skirt, and touched the folds of hair.

"But, my bairn, the dew is thick on your head and has taken all the starch out of your dress. Please come out of this fog that is creeping up like a serpent from the sea. You are not used to such damp air, and it might give you rheumatic cramps."

"Well, suppose it should? Does not my white head entitle me to all such luxuries of old age and decrepitude? Don't bother me, Elsie."

She put out her hand with a repellent gesture, but Elsie seized it, and, clasping both her palms over the cold fingers, said, with irresistible tenderness,—

"Come, dearie!—come, my dearie!"

Without a word Mrs. Gerome turned and followed her across the lawn and into the house, whose internal arrangement was somewhat at variance with its unpretending exterior.

The rooms were large, with low ceilings; and fire-places, originally wide and deep, had been recently filled and fitted up with handsome grates, while the heavy mantel-pieces of carved cedar, that once matched the broad facings of the windows and the massive panels of the doors, were exchanged for costly *verd antique* and lumachella. The narrow passage running through

Digitized by Google

the centre of the building was also wainscoted with cedar and adorned with fine engravings of Landseer's best pictures, whose richly carved walnut frames looked almost cedarn in the pale chill light that streamed upon them through the violet-colored glass which surrounded the front door and effectually subdued the hot golden glare of the sunny sun. The old-fashioned folding doors that formerly connected the parlor and library had been removed to make room for a low, wide arch, over which droope lace curtains, partially looped with blue silk cord and tassels, and both apartments were furnished with sofas and chairs of rosewood and blue satin damask, while the velvet carpet, with its azure ground strewn with wreaths of white roses and hyacinths, corresponded in color. Handsome book-cases, burdened with precious lore, lined the walls of the rear room; and on either side of a massive ormolu *escritoire*, bronze candelabra shed light on the blue velvet desk where lay delicate sheets of gossamer paper with varied and *outré* monograms, guarded by an exquisite marble statuette of Harpocrates, which stood in the mirror-panelled recess reserved for pen, ink, and sealing-wax. The air was fragrant with the breath of flowers that nodded to each other from costly vases scattered through both apartments; and, before one of the windows, rose a bronze stand containing china jars filled with pelargoniums, in brilliant bloom. An Erard piano occupied one corner of the parlor, and the large harp-shaped stand at its side was heaped with books and unbound sheets of music. Here two long wax candles were now burning brightly, and, on the oval marble table in the centre of the floor, was a superb silver lamp representing Psyche bending over Cupid, and supporting the finely-cut globe, whose soft radiance streamed down on her burnished wings and eagerly-parted sweet Greek lips. The design of this exceedingly beautiful lamp would not have disgraced Benvenuto Cellini, nor its execution have reflected discredit upon the genius of Felicie Fauveau, though to neither of these distinguished artificers could its origin have been justly ascribed. In its mellow, magical glow, the fine paintings suspended on the walls seemed to catch a gleam of "that light that never was on sea or land," for their dim, purplish Alpine

Digitized by Google

gorges were filled with snowy phantasmagoria of rushing avalanches; their foaming cataracts braided glittering spray into spectral similitude of Undine tresses and Undine faces; their desolate red deserts grew vaguely populous with mirage mockeries; their green dells and grassy hill-sides, couching careless herds, and fleecy flocks, borrowed all Arcadia's repose; and the marble busts of Beethoven and of Handel, placed on brackets above the piano, shone as if rapt, transfigured in the mighty inspiration that gave to mankind "*Fidelio*" and the "*Messiah.*"

On the sofa which partially filled the oriel window, where the lace drapery was looped back to admit the breeze, lay an ivory box containing materials and models for wax-flowers; and, in one corner, half thrust under the edge of the silken cushion, was an unfinished wreath of waxen convolvulus and a cluster of gentians. There, too, open at the page that narrated the death-struggle, lay Liszt's "Life of Chopin," pressed face downwards, with two purple pansies crushed and staining the leaves; and a small gold thimble peeping out of a crevice in the damask tattled of the careless feminine fingers that had left these traces of disorder.

The collection of pictures was unlike those usually brought from Europe by cultivated tourists, for it contained no Madonnas, no Magdalenes, no Holy Families, no Descents or Entombments, no Saints, or Sibyls, or martyrs; and consisted of wild mid-mountain scenery, of solemn surf-swept strands, of lonely moonlit moors, of crimson sunsets in Cobi or Sahara, and of a few gloomy, ferocious faces, among which the portrait of Salvator Rosa smiled sardonically, and a head of frenzied Jocasta was preëminently hideous.

As Mrs. Gerome entered the parlor and brightened the flame of the Psyche lamp, her eyes accidentally fell upon the bust of Beethoven, where, in gilt letters, she had inscribed his own triumphant declaration, "*Music is like wine, inflaming men to new achievements; and I am the Bacchus who serves it out to them.*" While she watched the rayless marble orbs, more eloquent than dilating darkening human pupils, a shadow dense and mysterious drifted over her frigid face, and, without removing

Digitized by Google

her eyes from the bust above her, she sat down before the piano, and commenced one of those marvellous symphonies which he had commended to the study of Goethe.

Ere it was ended Elsie came in, bearing a waiter on which stood a silver *epergne* filled with fruit, a basket of cake, and a goblet of iced tea.

"My child, I bring your supper here because the dining-room looks lonesome at night."

"No, — no! take it away. I tell you I want nothing."

"But, for my sake, dear — "

"Let me alone, Elsie! There, — there! Don't teaze me."

The nurse stood for some moments watching the deepening gloom of the up-turned countenance, listening to the wierd strains that seemed to drip from the white fingers as they wandered slowly across the keys; then, kneeling at her side, grasped the hands firmly, and covered them with kisses.

"Precious bairn! don't play any more to-night. For God's sake, let me shut up this piano that is making a ghost of you! You will get so stirred up you can't close your eyes, — you know you will; and then I shall cry till day-break. If you don't care for yourself, dearie, do try to care a little for the old woman who loves you better than her life, and who never can sleep till she knows your precious head is on its pillow. My pretty darling, you are killing me by inches, and I shall stay here on my knees until you leave the piano, if that is not till noon to-morrow. You may order me away; but not a step will I stir. God help you, my bairn!"

Mrs Gerome made an effort to extricate her hands, but the iron grasp was relentless; and, in a tone of great annoyance, she exclaimed, —

"Oh, Elsie! You are an intolerable — "

"Well, dear, say it out, — an intolerable old fool! Isn't that what you mean?"

"Not exactly; but you presume upon my forbearance. Elsie, you must not interrupt and annoy me, for I tell you now I will not submit to it. You forget that I am not a child."

"Darling, you will never be anything but a child to me, — the

Digitized by Google

same pretty child I took from its dead mother's arms and carried for years close to my heart. So scold me as you may, my pet, I shall love you and try to take care of you just as long as there is breath left in my body."

She ended by kissing the struggling hands; and, striving to conceal her vexation, Mrs. Gerome finally turned and said, —

"If you will eat your supper, and stay with Robert, and leave me in peace, I promise you I will close the piano, which your flinty Scotch soul can no more appreciate than the brick and mortar that compose these walls. You mean well, my dear, faithful Elsie, but sometimes you bore me fearfully. I know I am often wayward; but you must bear with me, for, after all, how could I endure to lose you, — you the only human being who cares whether I live or die? There, — go! Good night!"

She threw her arms around Elsie's neck, leaned her wan cheek for an instant only on her shoulder, then pushed her away and hastily closed the piano.

Two hours later, when the devoted servant stole up on tiptoe, and peeped through the half-open door that led into the hall, she found the queenly figure walking swiftly and lightly across the room from oriel to arch, with her hands clasped over the back of her head, and the silvery lamp-light shining softly on the waves of burnished hair that rippled around her pure, polished forehead.

As she watched her mistress, Elsie's stout frame trembled, and hot tears streamed down her furrowed face while she lifted her heart in prayer, for the dreary, lonely, lovely woman, who had long ago ceased to pray for herself. But when the quivering lips of one breathed a petition before the throne of God, the beautiful cold mouth of the other was muttering bitterly, —

> "Yea, love is dead, and by her funeral bier
> Ambition gnaws the lips, and sheds no tear;
> And, in the outer chamber Hope sits wild, —
> Hope, with her blue eyes dim with looking long."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

"ULPIAN, why do you look so grave and grieved? Does your letter contain bad news?"

Miss Jane pushed back her spectacles and glanced anxiously at her brother, who stood with his brows slightly knitted, twirling a crumpled envelope between his fingers.

"It is not a letter, but a telegraphic dispatch, summoning me to the death-bed of my best friend, Horace Manton."

"The man whose life you saved at Madeira?"

"Yes; and the person to whom, above all other men, I am most strongly and tenderly attached. His constitution is so feeble that I have long been uneasy about him; but the end has come even earlier than I feared."

"Where does he live?"

"On the Hudson, a few miles above New York City. I have no time to spare, for I shall take the train that leaves at one o'clock, and must make some arrangement with Dr. Sheldon to attend my patients. Will it trouble or tire you too much to pack my valise while I write a couple of business letters? If so, I will call Salome to assist you."

"Trouble me, indeed! Nonsense, my dear boy; of course I will pack your valise. Moreover, Salome is not at home. How long will you be absent?"

"Probably a week or ten days,—possibly longer. If poor Horace lingers, I shall remain with him."

"Wait one moment, Ulpian. Before you go I want to speak to you about Salome."

"Well, Janet, I lend you my ears. Has the girl absolutely turned pagan and set up an altar to Ceres, as she threatened some weeks since? Take my word for the fact that she does not believe or mean one half that she says, and is only amusing herself by trying to discover how wide her audacious heresies can expand your dear orthodox eyes. Expostulation and entreaty

Digitized by Google

only feed her affected eccentricities and skepticism, and if you will persistently and quietly ignore them, they will shrivel as rapidly as a rank gourd-vine, uprooted on an August day."

"Pooh! pooh! my dear boy. How you man do prate sometimes of matters concerning which you are as ignorant as the yearling calves and gabbling geese that I suppose your learned astronomers see driven every day to pasture on that range of mountains in the moon — Eratosthenes — that modern science pretends to have discovered, and about which you read so marvellous a paper last week."

Miss Jane reverently clung to the dishonored remnants of the Ptolemaic theory, and scouted the philosophy of Copernicus which she vehemently averred was not worth "a pinch of snuff," else the water in the well would surely run out once in every twenty-four hours. Now, as she dived into the depths of her stocking-basket, collecting the socks neatly darned and rolled over each other, her brother smiled, and answered, good humoredly, —

"Dear Janet, I really have not time to follow you to the moon, nor to prove to you that your astronomical doctrines have been dead and decently buried for nearly three hundred years; but I should like to hear what you desire to tell me with reference to Salome. What is the matter now?"

"Nothing ails her, except a violent attack of industry, which has lasted much longer than I thought possible; for, to tell you the truth without stint or varnish, she certainly was the most sluggish piece of flesh I ever undertook to manage. Study she would not, keep house she could not, sewing gave her the headache, and knitting made her cross-eyed; but, behold! she has suddenly found out that her pretty little pink palms were made for something better than propping her peach-bloom cheeks. A few days ago I accidentally discovered that she was sitting up until long after midnight, and when I questioned her closely, she finally confessed that she had entered into a contract to furnish a certain amount of embroidery every month. Bless the child! can you guess what she intends to do with the money? Hoard it up in order to rent a couple of rooms, where she can

Digitized by Google

take Jessie and Stanley to live with her. Ulpian, it is a praiseworthy aim, you must admit."

"Eminently commendable, and I respect and admire the motive that incites her to such a laborious course. At present she is too young and inexperienced to take entire charge of the children, and I know nothing of your plans or intentions concerning her future; but, let me assure you, dear Jane, that I will cordially coöperate in all your schemes for aiding her and providing a home for them, and my purse shall not prove a laggard in the race with yours. Recently I have been revolving a plan for their benefit, but am too much hurried just now to give you the details. When I return we will discuss it *in extenso*."

"You know that I ascribe great importance to blood, but, strange as it may appear, that girl Salome has always tugged hard at my heart-strings, as if our proud old blood beat in her veins; and sometimes I fancy there must be kinship hidden behind the years, or buried in some unknown grave."

"Amuse yourself while I am away by digging about the genealogical tree of the house of Grey, and, if you can trace a fibre that ramifies in the miller's family, I will gladly bow to my own blood wherever I find it, and claim cousinship. Meantime, my dear sister, do keep a corner of your loving heart well swept and dusted for your errant sailor-boy."

He hastily kissed her cheek and turned away to write letters, while she went into the adjoining room to pack his clothes.

When Salome returned from town, whither she had gone to carry a package of finished work and obtain a fresh supply, she found Miss Jane alone in the dining-room, and wearing a dejected expression on her usually cheerful countenance.

"Did Ulpian tell you good-by?"

"No, I have not seen him. Where has he gone?"

"To New York."

The long walk and sultry atmosphere had unwontedly flushed the girl's face, and the damp hair clung in glossy rings to her brow; but, as Miss Jane spoke, the blood ebbed from cheeks and lips, and sweeping back the dark tresses that seemed to oppress her, she asked, shiveringly, —

Digitized by Google

"Is Dr. Grey going back to sea?"

"Oh no, child! An old friend is very ill, and telegraphed for him. Sit down, dear, — you look faint."

"Thank you, I don't wish to sit down, and there is nothing the matter with me. When will he come home?"

"I can not tell precisely, as his stay is contingent upon the condition of his friend."

"Is it a man or woman whom he has gone to see?"

The astonishment painted on Miss Jane's face would have been ludicrous to a careless observer, less interested than the orphan in her slow and deliberate reply.

"A man, of course."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Certainly. He went to see Mr. Horace Manton, with whom he was associated while abroad. But suppose it had been some winsome, brown-eyed witch of a woman, instead of a dying man, what then?"

"Then you would have lost your brother, and I my French pronouncing dictionary, — that is all. Did he leave any message about my grammar and exercises?"

"No, dear; but he started so hurriedly — so unexpectedly — he had not time for such trifles. Where are you going?"

"To put away my bonnet and bundle, and look after Stanley, who is romping with the kittens on the lawn."

The old lady laid down her knitting, leaned her elbows on the arms of her rocking-chair, and, clasping her hands, bowed her chin upon them, while a half-stifled sigh escaped her.

"Mischief, — mischief, where I meant only kindness! I sowed good seed, and reap thistles and brambles! My charity-cake turns out miserable dough! But how could I possibly foresee that the child would be such a simpleton? What right has she to be so unnecessarily interested in my brother, who is old enough to have been her father? It is unnatural, absurd, and altogether unpardonable in Salome to be guilty of such presumptuous nonsense; and, of course, it is not in the least my fault, for the possibility of this piece of mischief never once occurred to me! True, she is as old as Ulpian's mother was when father

Digitized by Google

married her; but then Mrs. Grey was not at all in love with her white-haired husband, and had set her affections solely on that Mercer-Street house, with marble steps and plate-glass windows. How do I know that, after all, Salome is not in love with Ulpian's fortune instead of the dear boy's blue eyes, and handsome hair, and splendid teeth? However, I ought not to think so harshly of the child, for I have no cause to consider her calculating and selfish. Poor thing! if she really cares for him there are breakers ahead of her, for I am sure that he is as far from falling in love with her as I would be with the ghost of my great-grandfather's uncle. Thank Providence, all this troublesome, mischievous, Lucifer machinery of love and marriage is shut out of heaven, where we shall be as the angels are. Ah, Salome! I fear you are a giddy young idiot, and that I am a blind old imbecile, and I wish from the bottom of my heart you had never darkened my doors."

The quiet current of Miss Jane's secluded life had never been ruffled by a serious *affaire du cœur;* consequently she indulged little charity towards those episodes, which displayed what she considered the most humiliating weakness of her sex.

While puzzling over the best method of extricating her *protégé* from the snare into which she was disposed to apprehend that her own well-meant but mistaken kindness had betrayed her, she saw an unsealed note lying beneath the table, and, by the aid of her crutch, drew it within reach of her fingers. A small sheet of paper, carelessly folded and addressed to Salome, merely contained these words,—

"I congratulate you, my young friend, on the correctness of your French themes, which I leave in the drawer of the library-table. When I return I will examine those prepared during my absence; and, in the interim, remain,

"Very respectfully,

"ULPIAN GREY."

Miss Jane wiped her glasses, and read the note twice; then held it between her thumb and third finger, and debated the

Digitized by Google

expediency of changing its destination. Her delicate sense of honor revolted at the first suggestion of interference, but an intense aversion to "love-scrapes" finally strengthened her prudential inclination to crush this one in its incipiency; and she deliberately tore the paper into shreds, which she tossed out of the window.

"If Ulpian only had his eyes open he would never have scribbled one line to her; and, since I know what I know, and see what I see, it is my duty to take the responsibility of destroying all fuel within reach of a flame that may prove as dangerous as a torch in a hay-rick."

Limping into the library, she took from the drawer the two books containing French exercises and laid them in a conspicuous place on the table, where they could not fail to arrest the attention of their owner; after which she resumed her knitting, consoling herself with the reflection that she had taken the first step towards smothering the spark that threatened the destruction of all her benevolent schemes.

Up and down, under the spreading trees in the orchard, wandered Salome, anxious to escape scrutiny, and vaguely conscious that she had reached the cross-roads in her life, where haste or inadvertence might involve her in inextricable difficulties.

She was neither startled, nor shocked, nor mortified, that the unceremonious departure of the master of the house stabbed her heart with pangs that made her firm lips writhe, for she had long been cognizant of the growth of feelings whose discovery had so completely astounded Miss Jane.

The orphan had not eagerly watched and listened for the sight of his face — the sound of his voice — without fully comprehending herself; for, however ingeniously and indefatigably women may mask their hearts from public gaze and comment, they do not mock their own reason by such flimsy shams, and Salome could find no prospect of gain in playing a game of brag with her inquisitive soul.

In the quiet orchard, where all things seemed drowsy — where the only spectators were the mellowing apples that reddened the

Digitized by Google

boughs above her, and her sole auditors the brown partridges that nestled in the tall grass, and the shy cicadæ ambushed under the clover leaves — her pent-up pain and disappointment bubbled over in a gush of passionate words.

"Gone without giving me a syllable, a word, a touch! Gone, for an indefinite period, without even a cold 'good-by, Salome!' You call yourself a Christian, Dr. Grey, and yet you are cruel, now and then, and make me writhe like a worm on a fish-hook! He told Stanley he would return in two or three weeks, perhaps sooner, — but I know better. I have a dull monitor here that says it will be a long, dreary time, before I see him again. A wall of ice is rising to divide us — but it shall not! it shall not! I will have my own! I will look into his calm eyes! I will touch his soft, warm, white palms! I will hear his steady, low, clear voice, that makes music in my ears and heaven in my heart! It is three months since he shook hands with me, but all time cannot remove the feeling from my fingers; and some day I can cling to his hand and lean my cheek against it, — and who dare dispute my right? He says he never loved any woman! I heard him tell his sister he had yet to meet the woman whom he could marry, — and, if truth lingers anywhere in this world of sin, it finds a sanctuary in his soul! He never loved any woman! Thank God! I can't afford to doubt it. No one but his sister has touched his lips, or his noble, beautiful forehead. How I envied little Jessie when he put his arm around her and stooped and laid his cheek on hers. Oh, Dr. Grey, nobody else will ever love you as I do! I know I am unworthy, but I will make myself good and great to match you! I know I am beneath you, but I will climb to your proud height, — and, so help me God, I will be all that your lofty standard demands! He does not care for me now, — does not even think of me; but I must be patient and merit his notice, for my own folly sank me in his good opinion. When these apples were pale, pink blossoms, I dreaded his coming, and hoped the vessel would be wrecked; now, ere they are ripe, I am disposed to curse the cause of his temporary absence and think myself ill-used that no farewell privileges were granted me. Now I can understand why people

Digitized by Google

find comfort in praying for those they love; for what else can I do but pray while he is away? Oh, I shall not, cannot, will not, miss my way to heaven if he gets there before me!"

In utter abandonment she threw herself down in the long yellow sedge-grass, — frightening a whole covey of gossiping young partridges and a couple of meek doves, all of which whirred away to an adjacent pea-field, leaving her with her face buried in her hands, and watched by trembling mute crickets and cicadæ.

On the topmost twig of the tallest tree a mocking-bird poised himself, and sympathetically poured out his vesper canticle, — a song of condolence to the prostrate figure who, just then, would have preferred the echo of a man's deep voice to all Pergolese's strains.

After a little while pitying Venus swung her golden globe in among the apple-boughs, peeping compassionately at her luckless votary; and, finally, in the violet west, —

> "Two silver beacons sphered in the skies,
> Eve in her cradle opening her eyes."

Two weeks dragged themselves away without bringing any tidings of the absent master; but, towards the close of the third, a brief letter informed his sister that the invalid friend was still alive, though no hope of his recovery was entertained, and that it was impossible to fix any period for the writer's return. Salome asked no questions, but the eager, hungry expression, with which she eyed the letter as it lay on the top of the stocking-basket, touched Miss Jane's tender heart; and, knowing that it contained no allusion to the orphan, she put it into her hand, and noticed the cloud of disappointment that gathered over her features as she perused and refolded it. Another week — monotonous, tedious, almost interminable — crept by, and one morning as Salome passed the post-office she inquired for letters, and received one post-marked New York and addressed to Miss Jane.

Hurrying homeward with the precious missive, her pace would well-nigh have distanced Hermes, and the dusty winding

Digitized by Google

road seemed to mock her with lengthening curves while she pressed on; but at last she reached the gate, sped up the avenue, and, pausing a moment at the threshold to catch her breath and appear *nonchalant*, she demurely entered Miss Jane's apartment. The only occupant was a servant sewing near the window, and who, in reply to an eager question, informed Salome that the mistress had gone to spend the day with a friend whose residence was six miles distant.

The girl bit her lip until the blood started, and, to conceal her chagrin, took refuge in the parlor, where the quiet dimness offered a covert. Locking the door, she sat down in one of the cushioned rocking-chairs and looked at the letter lying between her fingers. The gilt clock on the mantel uttered a dull, clicking sound, and a little green and gold-colored bird hopped out and "cuckooed" ten times. Miss Jane would not probably return before seven, possibly eight o'clock, and what could be done to strangle those intervening nine hours?

The blood, heated by exercise and impatience, throbbed fiercely in her temples and thumped heavily at her heart, producing a half-suffocating sensation; and, in her feverish anxiety, the doom of Damiens appeared tolerable in comparison with the torturing suspense of nine hours on the rack.

The envelope was an ordinary white one, merely sealed with a solution of gum arabic, and dexterous fingers could easily open and reclose it without fear of detection, especially by eyes so dim and uncertain as those for which it had been addressed. A damp cloth laid upon the letter would in five minutes prove an *open sesame* to its coveted contents, and a legion of fiends patted the girl's tingling fingers and urged her to this prompt and feasible relief from her goading impatience. Secure from intrusion and beyond the possibility of discovery, she turned the envelope up and down and over, examining the seal; and the amber gleams lying *perdu* under the shadows of her pupils rayed out, glowing with a baleful Lucifer light, as infallibly indicative of evil purposes as the sudden kindling in a crouching cat's or cougar's gaze, just as they spring upon their prey.

It was a mighty temptation, cunningly devised and opportunely

Digitized by Google

presented, and six months ago her parley with the imps of Apollyon who contrived it would not have lasted five minutes; but, in some natures, love for a human being will work marvels which neither the fear of God, nor the hope of heaven, nor yet the promptings of self-respect have power to accomplish.

Now while Salome dallied with the tempter and gave audience to the clamors of her rebellious heart, she looked up and met the earnest gaze of a pair of sunny blue eyes in a picture that hung directly opposite.

It was an admirable portrait of Dr. Grey, clad in full uniform as surgeon in the U. S. Navy, and painted when he was twenty-eight years old. Up at that calm, cloudless countenance, the girl looked breathlessly, spell-bound as if in the presence of a reproving angel; and, after some seconds had elapsed, she hurled the unopened letter across the room, and lifted her hands appealingly,—

"No,—no! I did not—I can not—I will not act so basely! I must not soil fingers that should be pure enough to touch yours. I was sorely tempted, my beloved; but, thank God, your blessed blue eyes saved me. It is hard to endure nine hours of suspense, but harder still to bear the thought that I have stooped to a deed that would sink me one iota in your good opinion. I will root out the ignoble tendencies of my nature, and keep my heart and lips and hands stainless,—hold them high above the dishonorable things that you abhor, and live during your absence as if your clear eyes took cognizance of every detail. Yea,—search me as you will, dear deep-blue eyes,—I shall not shrink; for the rule of my future years shall be to scorn every word, thought, and deed that I would not freely bare to the scrutiny of the man whose respect I would sooner die than forfeit. Oh, my darling, it were easier for me to front the fiercest flames of Tophet than face your scorn! I can wait till Miss Jane sees fit to show me the letter, and, if it bring good news of your speedy coming, I shall have my reward; if not, why should I hasten to meet a bitter disappointment which may be lagging out of mercy to me?"

Picking up the letter as suspiciously as if it had been dropped

Digitized by Google

by the Prince of Darkness on the crest of Quarantina, she stepped upon a table and inserted the corner of the envelope in the crevice between the canvas and the portrait-frame, repeating the while a favorite passage that she had first heard from Dr. Grey's lips,—

> "'God meant me good too, when he hindered me
> From saying "yes" this morning. I say no, — no!
> I tie up "no" upon His altar-horns,
> Quite out of reach of perjury!'"

Young though she was, experience had taught her that the most effectual method of locking the wheels of time consisted in sitting idly down to watch and count their revolutions; consequently, she hastened up-stairs and betook herself vigorously to the work of embroidering a *parterre* of flowers on the front-breadth of an infant's christening-dress which her employer had promised should be completed before the following Sabbath.

Stab the laggard seconds as she might with her busy needle, the day was drearily long; and few genuine cuckoo-carols have been listened to with such grateful rejoicing as greeted those metallic gutturals that once in every sixty minutes issued from the throat of the gaudy automaton caged in the gilt clock.

True, nine hours are intrinsically nine hours under all circumstances, whether decapitation or coronation awaits their expiration; but to the doomed victim or the heir-apparent they appear relatively shorter or longer. At last Salome saw that the shadows on the grass were lengthening. Her head ached, her eyes burned from steady application to her trying work, and laying aside the cambric, she leaned against the window-facing and looked out over the lawn, where Time seemed to have fallen asleep in the mild autumn sunshine.

How sweet and welcome was the distance-muffled sound of tinkling cow-bells, and the low bleating of homeward-strolling flocks, wending their way across the hills through which the road crawled like a dusty gray serpent.

A noisy club of black-birds that had been holding an indignation meeting in the top of a walnut tree near the gate, adjourned

Digitized by Google

to the sycamore grove that overshadowed the barn in the rear of the house; and Stanley's pigeons, which had been cooing and strutting in the avenue, went to roost in the pretty painted pagoda Dr. Grey had erected for their comfort. Finally, the low-swung, heavy carriage, with its stout dappled horses, gladdened Salome's strained eyes; and, soon after, she heard the thump of Miss Jane's crutches and her cheerful voice, asking, —

"Where are the children? Tell them I have come home. Bless me, the house is as dark as a dungeon! Rachel, have we neither lamps nor candles?"

The orphan stole down the steps, climbed upon the table in the parlor, and, seizing the letter, hurried into the dining-room, where, quite exhausted by the fatigue of the day, the old lady lay on the sofa.

She held out her hand and drew the girl's face within reach of her lips, saying, —

"My child, I am afraid you have had rather a lonely day."

"Decidedly the loneliest and longest I ever spent, and I believe I never was half so glad to see you come home as just now when the carriage stopped at the door."

Ah, what hypocrisy is sometimes innocently masked by the earnest utterance of the truth! And what marvels of industry are accomplished by self-love, which seeks more assiduously than bees for the honied drops of flattery that feed its existence!

Miss Jane was pardonably proud that her presence was so essential to the happiness of the orphan whom she fondly loved, and gratification spread a pleasant smile over her worn features.

"Where is Stanley? The child ought not to be out so late."

"He went down to the sheep-pen to count the lambs and look after one that broke its leg yesterday. Miss Jane, are you too much fatigued to read a letter which I found this morning in your box at the post-office?"

"Is it from Ulpian? I was wondering to-day why I did not hear from him. Dear me, what have I done with my spectacles? They are the torment of my life, for the instant I take them off my nose they seem to find wings. Give me the letter,

Digitized by Google

and see whether I left my glasses on the bed where I put my bonnet."

Salome went into the next room and unsuccessfully searched the bed, bureau, table, and wardrobe; and, in an agony of impatience, returned to the invalid.

"You must have lost them before you came home; I can't find them anywhere. Let me read the letter to you."

"No; I must have my glasses. Perhaps I dropped them in the carriage. Send word to the driver to look for them. It was very careless in me to lose them, but I am growing so forgetful. Rachel, do hunt for my spectacles."

Salome ground her teeth to suppress a cry of vexation; and, to conceal her impatience, joined heartily in the search.

Finally she found the glasses on the front steps, where they had fallen when their owner left the carriage; and, feeling that adverse fate could no longer keep her in suspense, she hurried into the house and adjusted them on Miss Jane's eagle nose.

Conscious that she was fast losing control over the nerves that were quivering from long-continued tension, Salome stepped to the open window and stood waiting. Would the old lady never finish the perusal? The minutes seemed hours, and the pulsing of the blood in the girl's ears sounded like muttering thunder.

Miss Jane sighed heavily, — cleared her throat, and sighed again.

"It is very sad, indeed! It is too bad, — too bad!"

Salome turned around, and exclaimed, savagely, —

"Why can't you speak out? What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Ulpian's friend is dead."

"Thank God!"

"For shame! How can you be so heartless?"

"If the man could not recover I should think you would be glad that he is at rest, and that your brother can come home."

"But the worst of the matter is that Ulpian is not coming home. Mr. Manton wished him to act as guardian for his daughter, who is in Europe, and Ulpian will sail in the next

Digitized by Google

teamer for England, to attend to some business connected with the estate. It is too provoking, isn't it? He says it is impossible to tell when we shall see him again."

There was no answer, and, when Miss Jane wiped her eyes and looked around, she saw the girl tottering towards the door, groping her way like one blind.

"Salome, — come here, child!"

But the figure disappeared in the hall, and when the moonlight looked into the orphan's chamber the soft rays showed a girlish form kneeling at the window, with a white face drenched by tears, and quivering lips that moaned in feeble, broken accents, —

"God help me! I might have known it, for I had a presentiment of terrible trouble when he went away. How can I trust God and be patient, while the Atlantic raves and surges between me and my idol? After all, it was an angel of mercy whose tender white hands held back this bitter blow for nine hours. Gone to Europe, and not one word — not one line — to me! Oh, my darling! you are trampling under your feet the heart that loves you better than everything else in the universe, — better than life, and its hopes of heaven!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"SALOME, where did you learn to sing? I was astonished this morning when I heard you."

"I have not yet learned, — I have only begun to practise."

"But, my child, I had no idea you owned such a voice. Where have you kept it concealed so long?"

"I was not aware that I had it until a month ago, when it accidentally discovered itself."

"It is very powerful."

Digitized by Google

"Yes, and very rough; but care and study will smooth and polish it. Miss Jane, please keep your eye on Stanley until I come home; for, although I left him with his slate and arithmetic, it is by no means certain that they will not part company the moment I am out of sight."

"Where are you going?"

"To carry back some work which would have been returned yesterday had not the weather been so inclement."

In addition to the package of embroidered handkerchiefs, Salome carried under her arm a roll of music and an instruction-book; and, when she reached the outskirts of the town, turned away from the main street and stopped at the door of a small comfortless-looking house that stood without enclosure on the common.

Two swart, black-eyed children were playing mumble-peg with a broken knife, in one corner of the room; a third, with tears still on its lashes, had just sobbed itself to sleep on a strip of faded carpet stretched before the smouldering embers on the hearth; while the fourth, a feeble infant only six months old, was wailing in the arms of its mother, — a thin, sickly woman, with consumption's red autograph written on her hollow cheeks, where the skin clung to the bones as if resisting the chill grasp of death. As she slowly rocked herself, striving to hush the cry of the child, her dry, husky cough formed a melancholy chorus, which seemed to annoy a man who sat before the small table covered with materials for copying music. His cadaverous, sallow complexion, and keen, restless eyes, bespoke Italian origin; and, although engaged in filling some blank sheets with musical notes, he occasionally took up a violin that lay across his knees, and, after playing a few bars, laid aside the bow and resumed the pen. Now and then he glanced at his wife and child with a scowling brow; but, as his eyes fell on their emaciated faces, something like a sigh seemed to heave his chest.

When Salome's knock arrested his attention he rose and advanced to the half-open door, saying, impatiently, —

"Well, miss, have you brought me any money?"

"Good morning, Mr. Barilli. Here are the ten dollars that I

Digitized by Google

promised, but I wish you to understand that in future I shall not advance one cent of my tuition-money. When the month ends you will receive your wages, but not one day earlier."

"I beg pardon, miss; but, indeed, you see —"

He did not conclude the sentence, but waved his hand towards the two in the rocking-chair and proceeded to count the money placed in his palm.

"Yes, I see that you are very destitute, but charity begins at home, and I have to work hard for the wages that you have demanded before they are due. Good morning, madam; I hope you feel better to-day. Come, Mr. Barilli, I have no time to waste in loitering. Are you ready for my lesson?"

"Quite ready, miss. Commence."

For three-quarters of an hour he listened to her exercises, which he accompanied with his violin, and afterwards directed her to sing an air from a collection of songs on the table. As her deep, rich contralto notes swelled round and full, he shut his eyes and nodded his head as if in an ecstacy; and, when she concluded, he rapped his violin heavily with the bow, and exclaimed, —

"Some day when you sing that at *Della Scala*, remember the poor devil who taught it to you in a hovel. Soaked as those old walls are with music from the most famous lips the world ever applauded, they hold no echoes sweeter than that last trill. After all, there is no passion — no pathos — comparable to a perfect contralto crescendo. It is wonderful how you Americans squander voices that would rouse all Europe into a *furore*."

"I am afraid your eager desire for pupils biases your judgment, and invests my voice with fictitious worth," answered Salome, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Ha! you mean that I flatter, in order to keep you. Not so, miss. If St. Cecilia herself asked tuition without good pay, I should shut the door in her face; but, much as I need money, I would not risk my reputation by praising what was poor. If one of my children — that miserable little Beatrice, yonder — only had your voice, do you think I would copy music, or teach

Digitized by Google

beginners, or live in this cursed hole? You have a fortune shut up in your throat, and some day, when you are celebrated, at least do me the justice to tell the world who first found the treasure; and, out of your wealth, spare me a decent tombstone in the Campo Santo of — of — "

He laughed bitterly, and, seizing his violin, filled the room with mournful *miserere* strains.

"How long a course of training do you think will be necessary before the inequalities in my voice can be corrected and my vocalization perfected?"

"You are very young, miss, and it would not do to strain your voice, which is well-nigh perfect in itself; but, of course, your execution is defective, — just as a young nightingale cannot warble all its strains before it is full-feathered. If you study faithfully, in one year, or certainly one and a half, you will be ready for your engagement at Della Scala. Hist! see if you can follow me?"

He played a subtle, chromatic passage, ending in a trill, and the orphan echoed it with such accuracy and sweetness that the teacher threw down his bow, and, while tears stood in his glittering eyes, he put his brown hand on the girl's head, and said, earnestly, —

"There ought to be feathers here instead of hair, for no nightingale, nestled in the olive groves of Italy, ever warbled more easily and naturally. Don't go out to the world as Miss Owen, — make it call you *Rosignuolo*. Take the next page in the instruction-book for a new lesson, and practise the old scales over before you touch the new, — they are like steps in a ladder, and save jumps and jars. God made your voice wonderful, and, if you are only careful not to undo his work, it will develop itself every year in fresh power and depth. Ha! if my poor squeaking Beatrice only had it! But there is no more music stored in her throat and chest than in a regiment of rats. Good day, miss. Your lesson is ended, and I go to buy some wood for my miserable shiverers."

He seized his hat and walking-stick and quitted the house, leaving his pupil to gather up her music and conjecture, mean-

Digitized by Google

while, whether the wood-yard or a neighboring bar-room was his real destination.

His dissipated habits had greatly impaired her faith in the accuracy of his critical acumen touching professional matters, and, as she rolled up the sheet of paper in her hands, Salome approached the feeble occupant of the rocking-chair, and said, rather abruptly,—

"Madam Barilli, you ought to know when your husband speaks earnestly and when he is merely indulging in idle flattery, and I wish to learn his real opinion of my voice. Will you tell me the truth?"

"Yes, miss, I will. I am no musician, and never was in Europe, where he studied; but he talks constantly of your voice, and tells me there is a fortune in it. Only last night he swore that if he could control it, he would not take a hundred thousand dollars for the right; and then, poor fellow, he fell into one of his fierce ways and boxed my little Beatrice's ears, because, he said, all the teachers in the *Conservatoire* could not put into her throat the trill that you were born with. Ah, no, he flatters no one now! He has forgotten how, since the day that I was coaxed to run away from my father's elegant home and marry the tenor singer of an opera troupe and the professor who taught me the gamut at boarding-school. Miss, you may believe him, for Sebastian Barilli means what he says."

"One hundred thousand dollars! I promise him and you that if one-half of that amount can be 'trilled' into my pocket you shall both be comfortable during the remainder of your days."

"Mine are numbered, and will end before your career begins; and, when you sing in Della Scala, I trust I shall be singing up yonder behind the stars, where cold and hunger and heart-ache and cruel words cannot follow me. But, miss, when I am gone, and Sebastian is over at the corner trying to drown his troubles, and my four helpless little ones are left here unprotected, for God's sake look in upon them now and then, and don't let them cry for bread. My own family long ago cast me off, and here I am a stranger; but you, who have felt the pangs

Digitized by Google

of orphanage, will not stand by and see my darlings starve! Oh, miss, the poor who cannot pity the poor must be hard-hearted indeed!"

The suffering woman pressed her moaning babe closer to her bosom, and, taking Salome's hand between her thin, hot fingers, bowed her tear-stained face upon it.

Grim recollections of similar scenes enacted in the old house behind the mill crowded upon the mind of the miller's daughter, hardening instead of melting her heart; but, withdrawing her fingers, she said in as kind a tone as she could command, —

"The poor are sometimes too poor to aid each other, and pity is most unpalatable fare; but, if your husband has not grossly deceived himself and me with reference to my voice, I will promise that your children shall not suffer while I live. For their sake do not despond, but try to keep up your spirits, else your husband will be utterly ruined. Gloomy hearthstones make club-rooms and bar-rooms populous. Good-by. When I come again, I will bring something to stimulate your appetite, which seems to require coaxing."

She stooped and looked for a minute at the gaunt, white face of the half-famished infant pressed against the mother's feverish breast, and an irresistible impulse impelled her to stroke back the rings of black hair that clustered on its sunken temples; then, snatching her music and bundle, she hurried out of the close, untidy room, and, once more upon the grassy common, drew a long, deep breath of pure fresh air.

Autumn, with orange dawns, and mellow, misty moons, when

> "Sweet, calm days, in golden haze
> Melt down the amber sky,"

had died on bare brown stubble-fields and vine-veined hillsides, purple with clustering grapes on leafless branches; and wintry days had come, with sleety morns and chill, crisp noons, and scarlet sunset banners flouting the silver stars in western skies, where the shivering, gasping old year had woven —

> "One strait gown of red
> Against the cold."

Digitized by Google

None of the earlier years of Salome's life seemed to her half so drearily long as the four monotonous months that followed Dr. Grey's departure; and, during the intervals between his brief letters to his sister, the orphan learned a deceptive quietude of manner, at variance with the tumultuous feelings that agitated her heart; for painful suspense which is borne with clenched hands and firmly-set teeth is not the more patient because sternly mute.

Which suffered least, Philoctetes howling on the shores of Lemnos, or the silent Trojan priest, writhing in a death-struggle with the serpent folds that crushed him before the altar of Neptune?

If any messages intended for Salome found their way across the ocean, they finally missed their destination, and reached the dead-letter office of Miss Jane's vast and inviolate pocket; and, while this apparent neglect piqued the girl's vanity, the blessed assurance that the absent master was alive and well proved a sovereign balm for all the bleeding wounds of *amour propre*.

In order to defray the expense of her musical tuition, which was carried on in profound secrecy, it was necessary to redouble her exertions; and all the latent energy of her character developed itself in unflagging work, which she persistently prosecuted early and late, and in quiet defiance of Miss Jane's expostulations and predictions that she would permanently impair her sight.

Paramount to the desire of amassing wealth that would enable her to provide for Jessie and Stanley rose the hope that the cultivation of her voice would invest her with talismanic influence over the man who was singularly susceptible of the magic of music; and, jealously guarding the new-found gift, she spared no toil to render it perfect.

Fearful that her suddenly acquired fondness for singing might arouse suspicion and inquiry, she rarely practised at home unless Miss Jane were absent; and, having procured a tuning-fork, she retreated to the most secluded portion of the adjoining forest and rehearsed her lessons to a mute audience of grazing cattle, sombre pines, nodding plumes of golden-rod, and shivering

Digitized by Google

white asters, belated and overtaken by wintry blasts. Alone with nature, she warbled as unrestrainedly as the birds who listened to her quavering crescendos; and more than once she had become so absorbed in this forest practising, that twinkling stars peeped down at her through the fringy canopy of murmuring firs.

In fulfilment of a promise given to Stanley, with the hope of stimulating him to more earnest study, Salome one day took a piece of sewing and her music-book, and set off with her brother for the sea-shore, where he was sometimes allowed to amuse himself by catching crabs and shrimps. The route they were compelled to take was very circuitous, since strangers were now forbidden to stroll through the grounds attached to "Solitude," which was the nearest point where land and ocean met. Following a cattle-path that threaded the bare brown hills and wound through low marsh meadows, Salome at length climbed a cliff that overhung the narrow strip of beach running along the base of the promontory, and, while Stanley prepared his net, she applied herself vigorously to the completion of a cluster of lilies of the valley which she had begun to embroider the preceding night.

It was a mild, sunny afternoon, late in December, with only a few flakes of white curd-like cirri drifting slowly before the stiffening south wind that came singing a song of the tropics over the gently heaving waste of waters —

"Where the green buds of waves burst into white froth flowers."

Two glimmering sails stood like phantoms on the horizon; and a silent colony of snowy gulls, perched in conclave on a bit of weed-wreathed drift floating landward, were the only living things in sight, save the childish figure on the yellow beach under the bleaching rocks, and the girlish one seated on the tallest cliff, where a storm-scarred juniper, bending inland, waved its scanty fringe in the fresh salt breeze.

No note of human strife entered here, nor hum of noisy business marts; and the solemn silence, so profound and holy, was broken only by the soft, mysterious murmur of the immemorial

Digitized by Google

ocean, as its crystal fingers smote the harp of rosy shells and golden sands.

Clasped in the crescent that curved a mile northward lay the house, and grove, and grounds of "Solitude," looking sombre in the distance, as the shadow of surrounding hills fell upon the dense foliage that overhung its quiet precincts, and toned down the garish red of the boat-house roof, which lent a brief dash of color to the peaceful picture. Beyond the last guarding promontory that seemed to have plunged through the shelving strand to bathe in blue brine and cut off all passage along its base, a strong well-trained eye might follow the trend of the coast even to the dim outlines and thread-like masts, that told where the distant town hugged its narrow harbor; and, in the opposite direction, low, irregular sand hills and brown marshes crept southward, as if hunting the warmth that alone could mantle them with living verdure.

As the afternoon wore away, the sinking sun dipped suddenly behind a wooded eminence, which, losing the warm purples it had worn since noon, grew chill and blue as his rays departed; and, weary of her work, Salome put it aside and began to practise her music lesson, beating time with her slender fingers on the bare juniper-roots, from which wind and rain had driven the soil. Running her chromatic scales, and pausing at will to trill upon any minor note that wooed her vagrant fancy, she played with her flexible voice as dexterous violinists toy with the obedient strings they hold in harmonious bondage to their bows.

Finally she pushed the exercises away, and began a *fantasia* from "Traviata," which she had heard Mr. Barilli play several times; and so absorbed was she in testing her capacity for vocal gymnastics that she failed to observe the moving figure dwarfed by distance and pacing the sands in front of "Solitude."

The rich, fresh tones which seemed occasionally to tremble with the excess of melody that burdened them played hide-and-seek among the hills, startling whole choruses of deep-throated echoes, and attending and retentive ocean, catching the strains on her beryl strings, bore them whither — and how far? To

Digitized by Google

palm-plumed equatorial isles, where dying auricular nerves mistook them for seraphic utterances? To toiling mariners, tossed helplessly by fierce typhoons, who, pausing in their scramble for spars, listened to the weird melody that presaged woe and wreck? To the broken casements of fishermen's huts, on distant shores, where anxious wives peered out in the blackening tempest, and shrank back appalled by sounds which sea-tradition averred were born in coral caves, mosaiced with blanching human skulls? What hoary hierophant in the mysteries of cataphonics and diacoustics will undertake to track those trills across the blue bosom of the Atlantic or the purplish billows of the Indian Ocean?

The wind went down with the sun; silver-edged cirri lost their glitter, and swift was

> . . . . . "The spread
> Of orange lustre through these azure spheres
> Where little clouds lie still like flocks of sheep,
> Or vessels sailing in God's other deep."

In that wondrous and magical after-glow which tenderly hovers over the darkening face of the dying day, like the strange, spectral smile that only sheds its cold, supernatural light on lips twelve hours dead, Salome's fair face and graceful *pose* was as softly defined against the western sky as some nimbussed saint or madonna on the golden background of old Byzantine pictures. Her small straw hat, wreathed with scarlet poppies, lay at her feet; and around her shoulders she had closely folded a bright plaid flannel cloak, which tinted her complexion with its ruddy hues, as firelight flushes the olive portraits that stare at it from surrounding walls, and the braided black hair and large hazel eyes showed every brown tint and topaz gleam.

Leaning her arms on the top of her music-book, she rested her chin upon them, and sat looking seaward, singing a difficult passage, in the midst of which her nimble voice tripped on an E flat, and, missing the staccato step, rolled helplessly down in a legato flood of melody; whereupon, with an impatient grimace she shut her eyes, weary of watching the wave-shimmer that

Digitized by Google

almost dazzled her. After a few seconds, when she opened them, there stood just on the edge of the cliff, as if poised in air, a woman whose face and form were as sharply cut in profile on the azure sea and sky as white cameo features on black agate grounds.

Around the tall figure shining folds of silver poplin hung heavy and statuesque, and over the shoulders a blue crape shawl was held by a beautiful blue-veined hand, where a sapphire asp kept guard; while a cluster of double violets fastened behind one shell-like ear breathed their perfume among glossy bands of gray hair.

> "There was no color in the quiet mouth,
> Nor fulness; yet it had a ghostly grace,
> Pathetically pale,"

and wan, and woful — the still face turned seaward, fronting a round white moon that was lifting its full disk out of the line where air and water met — she stood motionless.

Lifting her head, Salome shivered involuntarily, and grew a shade paler as she breathlessly watched the apparition, expecting that it would fade into blue air or float down and mingle with the waters that gave it birth. But there was no wavering mistiness about the shining drapery; and, presently, when she turned and came forward, the orphan, despite her sneers at superstition, felt the hair creep and rise on her temples, and, springing to her feet, they faced each other. As the stranger advanced, Salome unconsciously retreated a few steps, and exclaimed, —

"Gray-eyed, gray-haired, gray-clad, gray-faced, and rising out of that gray sea, I suppose I have at last met the gray ghost that people tell me haunts old 'Solitude.' But how came such a young face under that drift of white hair? If all ghosts have such finely carved, delicate noses and chins, such oval cheeks and pretty brows, most of us here in the flesh might thank fortune for a chance to 'shuffle off this mortal coil.' Say, are you the troubled evil spirit that haunts 'Solitude'?"

"I am."

Digitized by Google

The voice was so mournfully sweet that it thrilled every nerve in Salome's quivering frame.

"Phantom or flesh — which are you?"

"Mrs. Gerome, the owner of 'Solitude.'"

"Oh, indeed! I beg your pardon, madam, but I took you for a wraith! You know the place has always been considered unlucky — haunted — and you are such an extraordinary-looking person I was inclined to think I had stumbled on the traditional ghost. I am neither ignorant nor stupidly superstitious; but, madam, you must admit you have an unearthly appearance; and, moreover, I should be glad to know how you rose from the beach below to the top of this cliff? I see no feathers on your shoulders — no balloon under your feet!"

"I was walking on the sands in front of my door, and, hearing some very sweet strains that came floating down from this direction, I followed the sound, and climbed by means of steps cut in the side of this cliff. Since you regarded me as a spectre, I may as well tell you that I was beginning to fancy I was listening to one of the old sea-sirens, until I saw your rosy face and red lips, far too human for a dripping mermaid or a murderous, mocking Aglaiopheme."

"No more a siren, madam, than you are a ghost! I am only Salome Owen, the miller's child, waiting for that boy yonder, whose sublimest idea of heaven consists in the hope that its blessed sea of glass is brimming with golden shrimp. Stanley, run around the cliff, and meet me. It is too late for us to be here. We should have started home an hour ago."

"Who taught you 'Traviata'?"

"I am teaching myself, with what small help I can obtain from a vagabond musician, who calls himself Signor Barilli, and claims to have been a tenor singer in an opera troupe at Milan."

"You ought to cultivate your voice as thoroughly as possible."

"Why? Is it really good? Tell me, is it worth anything? No one has heard it except that Italian violinist; and, if he praises it, I sometimes fear it is because he is so horribly dissi

Digitized by Google

pated that he confounds my *bravura* runs with the clicking of his wine-glasses and the gurgling of his flask. Do you know much about music?"

"I have heard the best living performers, vocal and instrumental, and to a finer voice than yours I never listened; but you need study and practice, for your execution is faulty. You have a splendid instrument; but you do not yet understand its management. Where do you live?"

"At 'Grassmere,' a farm two miles behind those hills, and in a house hidden under elm and apple trees. Madam, it is very late, and I must bid you good-evening. Before I go, I should like to know, if you will not deem me unwarrantably impertinent, whether you are a very young person with white hair, or whether you are a very old woman with a wonderfully young face?"

For a moment there was no answer; and, supposing that she had offended her, the orphan bowed and was turning away, when Mrs. Gerome's calm, mournful tones arrested her:

"I am only twenty-three years old."

She walked away, turning her countenance towards the water, where moonlight was burnishing the waves; and, when Salome and Stanley had reached the bend in their path that would shut out the view of the beach, the former looked back and saw the silver-gray figure standing alone on the silent shore, communing with the silver sea, as desolate and as hopeless as Buchanan's "Penelope,"—

> "An alabaster woman, whose fixed eyes
> Stare seaward, whether it be storm or calm."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

"DOCTOR Sheldon, do you think she is dangerously ill?"

"I am afraid, Salome, that she will soon become so; for she is threatened with a violent attack of pneumonia, which would certainly be very dangerous to a woman of her age. It is a great misfortune that her brother is absent."

"Dr. Grey reached New York three days ago."

"Indeed! I will telegraph immediately, and hasten his return."

Dr. Sheldon was preparing a blister in the room adjoining the one occupied by Miss Jane, and the orphan stood by his side, twisting her fingers nervously over each other, and looking perplexed and anxious. He returned to his patient, and when he came out some moments later, and took up his hat, his countenance was by no means reassuring.

"Although I know that you are very much attached to Miss Jane, and would faithfully endeavor to nurse her, you are so young and inexperienced that I do not feel quite willing to leave her entirely to your guardianship; and, therefore, shall send a woman here to-night who will fully understand the case. She is a professional nurse, and Dr. Grey will be relieved to hear that his sister is in her hands, for he has great confidence in her good sense and discretion. I shall stop at the telegraph office, as I go home, and urge him to return at once. Give me his address. Do not look so dejected. Miss Grey has a better constitution than most persons are disposed to believe, and she may struggle through this attack."

The new year was ushered in by heavy and incessant rains, and, having imprudently insisted upon superintending the drainage of a new sheep-fold and the erection of an additional cattle-shed, Miss Jane had taken a severe cold, which resulted in pneumonia.

Assiduously and tenderly Salome watched over her, and even

Digitized by Google

after the arrival of Hester Dennison, the nurse, the orphan's solicitude would not permit her to quit the apartment where her benefactress lay struggling with disease; while Miss Jane shrank from the stranger, and preferred to receive the medicine from the hand of her adopted child.

When Dr. Sheldon stood by the bed early next morning, and noted the effect of his treatment, Salome's keen eye observed the dissatisfied expression of his face, and she drew sad auguries from his clouded brow. He took a paper from his pocket, and said, cheerfully, —

"Come, Miss Jane, get up a smile to pay me for the good news I bring. Can you guess what this means?" holding an envelope close to her eyes.

"More blisters and fever mixtures, I suppose. Doctor, my poor side is in a dreadful condition."

As she laid her hand over her left lung, she winced and groaned.

"How much would you give to have your brother's hand, instead of mine, on your pulse?"

"All that I am worth! But my boy is in Europe, and can't come back to me now, when I need him most."

"No, he is in New York. You have been dreaming, and forget that he has reached America."

"No, I never knew it. Salome, is there a letter?"

"No letter, but a dispatch announcing his arrival. I told you; but you must have fallen asleep while I was talking to you."

"No such thing! I have not slept a wink for a week."

"That is right, Miss Jane; scold as much as you like; it will do you no harm. But, meantime, let me tell you I have just heard from Dr. Grey, and he is now on his way home."

Salome was sitting near the pillow, and suddenly her head bowed itself, while her lips whispered, inaudibly, —

"Thank God!"

The invalid's face brightened, and, stretching her thin, hot hand towards the orphan, she touched her shoulder, and said, —

Digitized by Google

"Do you hear that, my child? Ulpian is coming home. When will he be here?"

"Day after to-morrow evening, I hope, if there is no detention and he makes all the railroad connections. I trust you will prove sufficiently generous to bear testimony to my professional skill, by improving so rapidly that when he arrives there will be nothing left to do but compliment my sagacity, and thank me for relieving you so speedily. Is not your cough rather better?"

She did not reply; and, bending down, he saw that she was asleep.

"Doctor, I am afraid she is not much better."

He sighed, shook his head, and beckoned Hester into the hall in order to question her more minutely concerning the patient.

That night and the next she was delirious, and failed to recognize any one; but about noon on the following day she opened her eyes, and, looking intently at Salome, who stood near the foot of the bed, she said, as if much perplexed,—

"I saw Ulpian just now. Where is he?"

"He will be here this afternoon, I hope. The train is due at two o'clock, and it is now a quarter past twelve."

"I tell you I saw him not ten minutes since."

"You are feverish, dear Miss Jane, and have been dreaming."

"Don't contradict me! Am I in my dotage, think you? I saw my boy, and he was pale, and had blood on his hands, and it ran down his beard and dripped on his vest. You can't deceive me! What is the matter with my poor boy? I will see him! Give me my crutches this instant!"

She struggled into a partially upright position, but fell back upon her pillow exhausted and panting for breath.

"You were delirious. I give you my word that he has not yet come home. It was only a horrible dream. Hester will assure you of the truth of what I say. You must lie still, for this excitement will injure you."

The nurse gave her a powerful sedative, and strove to divert

Digitized by Google

her thoughts; but ever and anon she shuddered and whispered, —

"It was not a dream. I saw my dear sailor-boy, and he was hurt and bleeding. I know what I saw; and if you and Hester swore till every star dropped out of heaven, I would not believe you. If I am old and dying, my eyes are better than yours. My poor Ulpian!"

Despite her knowledge of the feverish condition of the sick woman, and her incredulity with reference to the vision that so painfully disturbed her, Salome's lips blanched, and a vague, nameless, horrible dread seized her heart.

Very soon Miss Jane fell into a heavy sleep, and, while the nurse busied herself in preparing a bottle of beef-tea, the orphan sat with her head pressed against the bed-post, and her eyes riveted on the face of the watch in her palm, where the minute-hand seemed now and then to stop, as if for breathing-time, and the hour-hand to have forgotten the way to two o'clock.

For nearly six months Salome had counted the weeks and days, — had waited and hoped for the hour of Dr. Grey's return as the happiest of her life, — had imagined his greeting, the bright, steady glow in his fine eyes, the warm, cordial pressure of his white hand, the friendly tones of his pleasant voice; for, though he had failed to bid her good-by, fate could not cheat her out of the interview that must follow his arrival. Fancy had painted so vividly all the incidents that would characterize this longed-for greeting, that she had lived it over a thousand times; and, now that the meeting seemed actually at hand, she asked herself whether it were possible that disappointment could pour one poisonous drop into the brimming draught of joy that rose foaming in amber bubbles to her parched lips.

In the profound silence that pervaded the darkened room, the ticking of the watch was annoyingly audible, and seemed to Salome's strained and excited nerves so unusually loud that she feared it might disturb the sleeper. At a quarter to two o'clock she went to the hearth and noiselessly renewed the fire, laying two fresh pieces of oak across the shining brass andirons, whose feet represented lions' heads.

Digitized by Google

She swept the hearth, arranged some vials that were scattered on the dressing-table, and gave a few improving touches to a vase filled with white and orange crocuses, then crept back to the bedside and again picked up the watch. It still lacked fifteen minutes of two, and, looking more closely, she found that it had stopped. Tossing it into a hollow formed by the folds of the coverlid, and repressing an impatient ejaculation, she listened for the sound of the railroad whistle, which, though muffled by distance, had not failed to reach her every day during the past week.

Presently the silence, which made her ears ache, throbbed so suddenly that she started, but it was only the "cuckoo! cuckoo!" of the painted bird on the gilded clock. That clock was fifteen minutes slower than Miss Jane's watch; and Salome put her face in her hands, and tried to still the loud thumping sound of the blood at her heart.

The train was behind time. Only a few moments as yet, but something must have happened to occasion even this slight delay; and, if something, — what?

Hester came in and whispered, —

"Dinner is ready, and Stanley is hungry. Has Miss Jane stirred since I went out?"

"No; what time is it?"

"Half after two."

"Oh, nonsense! You are too fast."

"Not a minute, — begging your pardon. My brother stays at the dépot, and keeps my watch with the railroad time."

Salome went to the dining-room, gave Stanley his dinner, and, anxious to escape observation, shut herself in the dim, cold parlor, where she paced the floor until the cuckoo jumped out, chirped three times, and, as if frightened by the girl's fixed eyes, fluttered back inside the clock. More than an hour behind time! Now, beyond all hope or doubt, there had been an accident! Loss of sleep for several consecutive nights, and protracted anxiety concerning Miss Jane, had so unnerved the orphan that she was less able to cope successfully with this harrowing suspense than on former occasions; still the san-

Digitized by Google

guine hopefulness of youth battled valiantly with the ghouls that apprehension conjured up, and she remembered that comparatively trivial occurrences had sometimes detained the train, which finally brought all its human freight safely to the dépot.

The day had been very cold and gloomy; and thick, low masses of smoke-colored cloud scudded across the chill sky, whipped along their skirts by a stinging north-east blast into dun, ragged, trailing banners. Despite the keenness of the air, Salome opened one of the parlor windows and leaned her face on the broad sill, where a drizzling rain began to show itself. She had read and heard just enough with reference to the phenomena of *clairvoyance* to sneer at them in happy hours, and to recur helplessly to the same subject with a species of silent dread when misfortune seemed imminent. To-day, as Miss Jane's delirious utterances haunted every nook and cranny of her excited brain, permeating all topics of thought, she recalled many instances, on legendary record, where the dying were endowed with talismanic power over the secrets of futurity. Could it be possible that Miss Jane had really seen what was taking place many miles distant? Reason shook her hoary head, and jeered at such childish fatuity; but superstitious credulity, goaded by an intense anxiety, would not be silenced nor put to the blush, but boldly babbled of Swedenborg and burning Stockholm.

Once she had heard Dr. Grey tell his sister, in answer to some inquiry concerning the *arcana* of mesmerism, that he had bestowed much time and thought upon the investigation of the subject, and was thoroughly convinced that there existed subtle psychological laws whose operations were not yet comprehended, but which, when analyzed and studied, would explain the remarkable influence of mind over mind, and prove that the dread and baffling mysteries of psychology were merely normal developments of intellectual power instead of supernatural or spiritual manifestations.

This abstract view of the matter was, however, most unsatisfactory at the present juncture; and the current of Salome's reflections was abruptly changed by the sound of the locomotive whistle, — not the prolonged, steady roar, announcing arrival, but

Digitized by Google

the sharp, short, shrill note of departure. Soon after, the clock struck four, and, ere the echoes fell asleep once more in the sombre corners of the quiet parlor, Dr. Sheldon drove up to the front door and entered the house. Springing into the hall, Salome met him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Salome, your face frightens me. How is Miss Jane? Has she grown worse so rapidly since I was here this morning?"

"I see little change in her. But you have locked bad news behind your set teeth. Oh, for God's sake, don't torture me one second longer! Tell me the worst. What has happened?"

"The down-train was thrown from an embankment twenty feet high, and the cars took fire. Many lives have been sacrificed, and it is the most awful affair I ever heard of."

He had partially averted his head to avoid the sight of her whitening and convulsed features; but, laying her hands heavily upon his shoulders, she forced him to face her, and her voice sank to a husky whisper, —

"Is he dead?"

"I hope not."

"Speak out, — or I shall go mad! Is he dead?"

"Calm yourself, Salome, and let us hope for the best. We know nothing of the particulars of this dreadful disaster, and have learned the names of none of the sufferers. I have little doubt that Dr. Grey was on the train, but there is no certainty that he was injured. The regular up-train could not leave as usual, because the track was badly torn up; but a locomotive and three cars ran out a while ago with several surgeons and articles required for the victims. Pray sit down, my poor child, for you are unable to stand."

"Where did it happen?"

"Near Silver Run water-tank, — about forty miles from here. The accident occurred at twelve o'clock."

Salome's grasp suddenly relaxed, and, tossing her hands above her head, she laughed hysterically, —

"Ha, ha! Thank God, he is not dead! He is only hurt, — only bleeding. Miss Jane saw it all, and he is not dead, or she would have known it. Thank God!"

Digitized by Google

Dr. Sheldon was a stern man and renowned for his iron nerves, but he shuddered as he looked at the pinched, wan face, and heard the unnatural, hollow sound of her unsteady voice. Had care, watching, and suspense unpoised her reason?

Something of that which passed through his mind looked out of his eyes, and, interpreting their amazed expression, the girl waved her hand towards the door, and added, —

"I am not insane. Go in, and Hester will explain."

He turned away, and she went back to the dusky room and threw herself down on the sofa, opposite to the portrait of the U. S. surgeon.

Of what passed during the following two hours, she retained, in after years, only a dim, confused, painful memory of prayers and promises made to God in behalf of the absent.

Once before, when Miss Jane's death seemed imminent, she had been grieved and perplexed by the possibility that Dr. Grey would inherit the estate and usurp her domains; but to-day, when the Great Reaper hovered over the panting, emaciated sufferer, and simultaneously threatened the distant brother and sole heir of the extended possessions which this girl had so long coveted, the only thought that filled her heart with dread and wrung half-smothered cries from her lips was, —

"Spare his life, oh, my God! Leave me penniless — take friends, relatives, comforts, hopes of wealth — take all — take everything, but spare that precious life and bring him safely back to me! Have mercy on me, O Lord, and do not snatch him away! for, if I lose him now, I lose faith in Christ — in Thee — I lose all hope in time and eternity, and my sinful, wrecked soul will go down forever in a night that knows no dawning!"

For six months she had been indeed, —

> "A faded watcher through the weary night —
> A meek, sweet statue at the silver shrines,
> In deep, perpetual prayer for him she loved;"

but patience, dragging anchor, finally snapped its cable, and now, instead of an humble suppliant for the boon that alone

Digitized by Google

made existence endurable, she fiercely demanded that her idol should not be broken, and, battling with Jehovah, impiously thrust her life down before Him as an accursed and intolerable burden, unless her prayers were granted. Ah, what scorpions and stones we gather to our boards, and then dare charge the stinging mockeries against a long-suffering, loving God! Ten days before, Salome had meekly prayed, "Thy will be done," and had comforted herself with the belief that at last she was beginning to grow pious and trusting, like Miss Jane; but, at the first hint of harm to Dr. Grey, she sprang up, utterly oblivious of the protestations of resignation that were scarcely cold on her lips, and furious as a tigress who sees the hunter approach the jungle where all her fierce affections centre. God help us all who pray orthodoxly for His will, and yet, when the emergency arrives, fight desperately for our own, feeling wofully aggrieved that He takes us at our word, and moulds the clay which we make a Pharisaical pretense of offering!

A slow drizzling rain whitened the distant hills, that seemed to blanch in their helplessness as the wind smote them like a flail; and it wove a grayish veil over the leafless boughs of bending, shivering elms, on the long, dim avenue. The wintry afternoon closed swiftly, and, in its dusky dreariness, Salome listened to the tattoo of the rain on the roof, and to the *miserere* that wailed through the lonely chambers of her soul. The chill at her heart froze her to numbness and oblivion of the coldness of the atmosphere, and, when a servant came in to close the window against the slanting sleet, she lay so still that the woman thought her asleep, and stole away on tip-toe. The room grew dark; but, through the half-opened door, the light from the hall lamp crept in and fell on the gilded frame and painted face of the portrait, tracing a silvery path along the gloomy wall. As the night deepened, that wave of light rippled and glittered until the handsome features in the picture seemed to belong to some hierarch who peeped from a window of heaven, into a world drenched with unlifting darkness.

That oval piece of canvas had become the one fetich to which Salome's heart clung in silent adoration, defiant of the iconoclas-

Digitized by Google

tic touch of reason and the adverse decree of womanly pride; for natures such as hers will always grovel in the dust, hugging the mutilated fragments of their idol, rather than bow at some new, fretted shrine, where other images hold sway, commanding worship. Looking up almost wolfishly at that tranquil, shining countenance, she said to her sullen, mourning heart, —

"There are no more like him, and, if we lose him, there is nothing left in life, and all hope is at an end, and *finis* shall be printed on the first page of the book of our existence; and ruin, like a pitiless pall, shall cover what might have been a happy, possibly a grand and good, human career. We did not intend to love him, — no, no; we tried hard to hate him who stood between us and affluence and indolent ease, but he conquered us by his matchless magnanimity, and shamed our ignoble aims and base selfishness, and put us under his royal feet; and now we would rather be trampled by Ulpian, our king, than crowned by any other man. Let us plead with Christ to spare the only pilot who can save us from eternal shipwreck."

Lying there so helpless yet defiant in her desolation, some subtle thread of association, guided, perhaps, by the invisible fingers of her guardian angel, led her mind to a favorite couplet often quoted by Dr. Grey, —

> "I heard faith's low, sweet singing, in the night,
> And, groping through the darkness, touched God's hand."

If the painted lips in the aureola on the wall had parted and audibly uttered these words, they would scarcely have impressed her more powerfully as a message from the absent; and, rising instantly, the orphan prayed in chastened, humbled tones for strength to be patient, for ability to trust God's wisdom and mercy.

How often, when binding our idolized Isaacs upon the altar, and, meekly submissive to what appears God's inexorable mandates, we unmurmuringly offer our heart's dearest treasure, the sacrificial knife is stayed, and our loathed and horrible Moriahs, that erst smelt of blood and echoed woe, become hallowed Jehovah-jirehs, all aglow, not with devouring flames, but the

Digitized by Google

blessed radiance of God's benignant smile, and musical with thanksgiving strains. But Abraham's burden preceded Abraham's boon, and the souls who cannot patiently endure the first are utterly unworthy of the rapture of the last.

As the girl's mind grew calmer under the breath of prayer — which stills the billows of human passion and strife as the command of Jesus smoothed the thundering surf of Genesareth, — she recollected that she had absented herself from the sick-room for an unusually long time. How long, she could not conjecture, for the face of the clock was invisible, and she had ceased to count the cuckoo-notes; but her limbs ached, and a fillet of fire seemed to circle her brow.

With a lingering gaze upon the radiant portrait, she quitted the parlor, and went wearily back to renew her vigil.

Hester Dennison was cowering over the hearth, spreading her bony hands towards the crackling flames, and, walking up to the mantelpiece, Salome touched the nurse, and whispered, —

"Hester, what did the doctor say? Is there any change?"

"Hush!" The woman laid a finger on her lip, and glanced over her shoulder.

There was only the subdued light of a shaded lamp mingling with the flicker of the fire, and, as Salome's eyes followed those of the nurse, they rested upon the figure of a man kneeling at the bedside, and leaning his head against the pillow where Miss Jane's white hair was strewn in disorder.

A cry of delight, which she had neither the prudence nor power to repress, rang through the silent chamber, startling its inmates, and partially arousing the invalid. Salome forgot that life and death were grappling over the prostrate form of the aged woman, — forgot everything but the supreme joy of knowing that her idol had not been rudely shattered.

Springing to the bedside, she put out her hands, and exclaimed, rapturously:

"Oh, Dr. Grey! Were you much hurt? Thank God, you are alive and here! Indeed, He is merciful —"

"Hush! Have you no prudence? Quit the room, or be quiet."

Digitized by Google

Dr. Grey lifted his haggard face from the pillow, and the light showed it pallid and worn by acute suffering, while a strip of plaster pressed together the edges of a deep cut on his cheek. His clothes glistened with sleet, and bore stains that in daylight were crimson, though now they were only ominously dark.

The stern tones of his voice, suppressed though it was, stung the girl's heart; and she answered, in a pleading whisper,—

"Only tell me that you are not severely injured. Speak one kind word to me!"

"I am not dangerously hurt. Hush! Remember life hangs in the balance."

"Oh, Dr. Grey! will you not even shake hands with me, after all these dreary months of absence? This is hard, indeed."

She had stood at his side, with her hands extended imploringly; and now he moved cautiously, and, silently holding up one hand swathed in linen bands, pointed to his left arm, which was tightly splintered and bandaged.

The mute gesture explained all, and, sinking to the carpet, she pressed her lips to the linen folds, and to the coat-sleeve, where sleet and blood-spots mingled.

He could not have prevented her, even had he desired to do so; but at that instant his sister moaned faintly, and, bending forward to examine her countenance, he seemed for some minutes unconscious of the presence of the form crouching close by his side.

After a little while he looked down, sighed, and whispered,—

"My child, do go to bed. You can do no good here, and too much watching has already unstrung your nerves. Go to your room, and pray that God will spare our dear Janet to us."

Was this the welcome for which she had waited and longed—of which she had dreamed by day and by night? Not a touch, barely a brief, impatient glance, and a few reproving, indifferent words. She had rashly dared fate to cheat her out of this long-anticipated greeting, and the grim, grinning crone had accepted the challenge, and now triumphantly snapped her withered fingers in the face of the vanquished.

When coveted fruit that has been hungrily watched through

Digitized by Google

the slow, tedious process of ripening finally falls rosy and mellow into eagerly uplifted fingers, and breaks in a shower of bitter dust on the sharpened and fastidious palate, it rarely happens that the half-famished dupe relishes the taste; and Salome rose, feeling stunned and mocked.

In one corner of the room stood a chintz-covered lounge, and, creeping to it, she laid herself down; and, shading her features with her hand, looked through her fingers at the pale, grieved face of the anxious brother. Sometimes he stood up, studying the placid countenance of the sufferer, and now and then he walked softly to the fire-place, and held whispered conferences with Hester relative to the course of treatment that had been pursued.

But everywhere Salome's eyes followed him; and finally, when he chanced to glance at the couch, and noticed its occupant, whom he imagined fast asleep, he pointed to a blanket lying on a chair, and directed Hester to spread it over the girlish figure. The thoughtful act warmed the orphan's heart more effectually than the thick woollen cover; and when he sat down in an easy-chair close to the bed, and within range of Salome's vision, she yielded to the comforting consciousness of his presence. And, while her lips were moving in thanks for his preservation and return, exhausted nature seized her dues, and the girl fell asleep and dreamed that Dr. Grey stood by the lounge, and whispered,—

"No star goes down, but climbs in other skies;
The rose of sunset folds its glory up
To burst again from out the heart of dawn,
And love is never lost, though hearts run waste,
And sorrow makes the chastened heart a seer;
The deepest dark reveals the starriest hope,
And Faith can trust her heaven behind the veil."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X.

"YES, Hester, the danger is past; and, if the weather continues favorable, my sister will soon be able to sit up. My gratitude prompts me to erect an altar here, where the mercy of God stayed the Destroying Angel, as in ancient days David consecrated the threshing-floor of Araunah."

"Dr. Grey, if you can possibly spare, me I should like to go back to town to-day, as Dr. Sheldon has sent for me to take charge of a patient at his Infirmary."

"You ought not to desert me while I am so comparatively helpless; and I should be glad to have you remain, at least until I recover the use of my hands."

"Miss Salome can take my place, and do all that is really necessary."

"The child is so inexperienced I am almost afraid to trust her; still—"

"Don't speak so loud. She is standing behind the window-curtain."

"Indeed! I thought she left the room when I entered it. Of course, Hester, I will not detain you if it is necessary that you should be at the Infirmary; but I give you up very reluctantly. Salome, if you are at leisure, please come and see how Hester dresses my hand and arm, for I must rely upon your kind services when she leaves us. Notice the manner in which she winds the bandages. There, Hester,—not quite so tight."

"Dr. Grey, I never had an education, and am at best an ignorant, poor soul; therefore, not knowing what to think about many curious things that happen in sick-rooms, I should be glad to hear what you have to say concerning that vision of your sister. Remember, she saw it at the very minute that the accident happened. I don't believe in spirit-rapping, and such stuff as dancing tables, and spinning chairs, and pianos that

Digitized by Google

play tunes when no human being is near them; but I have heard and seen things that made the hair rise and stand on my head."

"The circumstance that occurred three days since is certainly rather singular and remarkable, but by no means inexplicable. My sister knew that I was then travelling by railroad, — that I would, without some unusual delay, reach the dépot at a certain hour, and, being in a delirious condition, her mind reverted to the probability of some occurrence that might detain me. Having always evinced a peculiar aversion to railroads, which she deems the most unsafe method of travelling, she had a feverish dream that took its coloring from her excited apprehension of danger to me; and this vision, born of delirium, was so vivid that she could not distinguish phantom from reality. In ninety-nine cases out of every hundred similar ones, the dream passes without fulfilment, and is rarely recollected or mentioned; but the hundredth — which may chance by some surprising coincidence to seem verified — is noised abroad as supernatural, and carefully preserved among 'well-authenticated spiritual manifestations.' If I had escaped injury, the freaks of my sister's delirium would have made no more impression on your mind than the ravings of a lunatic; and, since I was so unfortunate as to be bruised and burned, you must not allow yourself to grow superstitious, and attach undue importance to a circumstance which was entirely accidental, and only startling because so exceedingly rare. Presentiments, especially when occurring in cases of fever, are merely Will-o-the-wisps floating about in excited, diseased brains. While at sea, and constantly associated with sailors, whose minds constitute the most favorable and fruitful soil for the production of phantasmagoria and *diableries*, I had frequent opportunities of testing the fallacy and absurdity of so-called 'presentiments and forebodings.' I am afraid it is the absence of spirituality in the hearts of the people, that drives this generation to seek supernaturalism in the realm of merely normal physics. The only true spiritualism is that which emanates from the Holy Ghost, — conquers sinful impulses, and makes a Christian heart the temple of God."

Digitized by Google

Here Miss Jane called Hester into the adjoining room; and, turning to Salome, Dr. Grey added,—

"Notwithstanding the vaunted destruction of the ancient Hydra of superstition by the darts and javelins of modern rationalism, and the ponderous hot irons of empirics, it is undeniably true that the habit of 'seeking after a sign' survived the generation of Scribes and Pharisees whom Christ rebuked; and manifests itself in the middle of the nineteenth century by the voracity with which merely material phenomena are seized as unmistakable indications of preternatural agencies. The innate leaven of superstition triumphs over common sense and scientific realism, and men and women are awed by coincidences that reason scouts, but credulity receives with open arms. Salome, I regret exceedingly that I am forced to trouble you, but there are some important letters which I wish to mail to-day, and you will greatly oblige me by acting as amanuensis while I dictate. My present disabled condition must apologize for the heavy tax which I am imposing upon your patience and industry. Will you come to the library?"

She made no protestations of willingness to serve him, and confessed no delight at the prospect of being useful, but merely bowed and smiled, with an expression in her eyes that puzzled him.

Seated at the library-table, and writing down the sentences that he dictated while pacing the floor, Salome passed one of the happiest hours of her life; for it brought the blessed assurance that, for the present at least, he acknowledged his need of her.

One of the letters was addressed to Mr. Gerard Granville, an *attaché* of the American legation at Paris, and referred principally to financial affairs; and the other, directed to Muriel Manton, contained an urgent request that she and her governess would leave New York as speedily as possible and become inmates of his sister's house.

When she had folded the letters and sealed them with his favorite emerald signet, — bearing the words, "*Frangas non Flectes*," — Salome looked up, and asked,—

"How old is your ward, Miss Manton?"

Digitized by Google

"About your age, — though she looks much more childish."

"Pretty, of course?"

"Why 'of course'?"

"Simply because in novels they are always painted as pretty as Persephone; and the only wards I ever knew happen to be fictitious characters."

"Novels are by no means infallible mirrors of nature, and few wards are as attractive as my black-eyed pet. Muriel will be very handsome, I hope, when she is grown; but now she impresses me as merely sweet, piquant, and pretty."

"Did you know her prior to your recent visit?"

"Yes; her father's house was my home whenever I chanced to be in New York, and I have seen her, occasionally, since she was a little girl. For your sake, as well as mine, I am glad she will reside here, because I hope she will prove in every respect a pleasant companion for you."

"Thank you; but, unfortunately, that is one luxury of which I never felt the need, and with which, permit me to tell you, I can readily dispense. I have little respect for women, and no desire to be wearied with their inane garrulity."

She leaned back in her chair, and tapped restlessly with the end of the pen-staff on the morocco-covered table.

Dr. Grey looked down steadily and gravely into her provokingly defiant face, and replied very coldly, —

"Were I in your place, I think I should jealously guard my lips from the hasty utterance of sentiments that, if unfeigned, ought to bring a blush to every true woman's cheek; for I fear that she who has no respect for her own sex bids fair to disgrace it."

A scarlet wave rolled up from throat to temples, and the lurking yellow gleamed in her eyes, but the bend of her nostril and curve of her lips did not relax.

"Which is preferable, hypocrisy or irreverence?"

"Both are unpardonable, in a woman."

"Where is your vast charity, Dr. Grey?"

"Busy in sheltering that lofty ideal of genuine female perfection which you seem so pertinaciously ambitious to sully and degrade."

Digitized by Google

"You are harsh, and scarcely courteous."

"You will never find me less so when you vauntingly exhibit such mournful blemishes of character."

"At least, sir, I am honest, and show myself just what God saw fit to allow misfortune to make me."

"Hush, Salome! Do not add impiousness to the long catalogue of your sinful follies. I hoped that there was a favorable change in you before I left home, but I very much fear that, instead of exorcising the one evil spirit that possessed you, you have swept, and garnished, and settled yourself comfortably with seven new ones."

"And, like R. Chaim Vital, you come to pronounce *Nidui!* and banish my diabolical guests. If cauterization cures moral ulcers as effectually as those that afflict the flesh, then, verily, you intend I shall be clean and whole. You are losing patience with your graceless neophyte."

"Yes, Salome; because forced to lose faith in her inclination and capacity to sublimate her erring nature. Once for all, let me say that habitual depreciation of your own sex will not elevate you in the estimation of mine; for, however fallen you may find mankind, they nevertheless realize amid their degradation that,—

> "'Tis somewhat to have known, albeit in vain,
> One woman in this sorrowful, bad earth,
> Whose very loss can yet bequeath to pain
> New faith in worth.'"

There was no taunt, no bitterness, in his voice; but grievous disappointment, too deep for utterance; and the girl winced under it, though only the flush burning on cheek and brow attested her vulnerability.

"Remember, sir, that humanity was not moulded entirely from one stratum of pipe-clay. Only a few wear paint, enamelling, and gold as delicate costly Sevres; and, while the majority are only coarse pottery, it is scarcely kind — certainly not generous — in dainty, transparent china, belonging to king's

Digitized by Google

palaces, to pity or denounce the humble Delft or Wedgewood-ware doing duty in laborer's cottages."

"Very true, my poor little warped, blotched bit of perverse pottery; but of one vital truth permit me to assure you: the purity and elevation of our race depend upon preserving inviolate in the hearts of men a belief that women's natures are crystalline as that celebrated glass once made at Murano, which was so exceedingly fine and delicate that it burst into fragments if poison was poured into it."

"Then, obviously, I am no Venetian goblet; else long ago I should have shattered under the bitter, black juices poured by fate. It seems I am not worthy to touch the lips of doges and grand dukes; but let them look to it that some day, when spent and thirsty, they stretch not their regal hands for the common clay that holds what all their costly, dainty fragments can never yield. *Nous verrons!* 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.'"

Dr. Grey had resumed his walk, but the half-suppressed, passionate protest, whose underswell began to agitate her voice, arrested his attention, and he came to the table and stood close to the orphan.

"What is the matter with my headstrong young friend?"

She made no answer; but her elfish eyes sought his, and braved their quiet rebuke.

"This is the last opportunity I shall offer you to tell me frankly what troubles you. Can I help you in any way? If so, command me."

"Once you could have helped me, but that time has passed."

"Perhaps not. Try me."

"It is too late. You have lost faith in me."

"No; you have lost all faith in yourself, if you ever indulged any, — which I very much doubt. It is you who are faithless concerning your own defective character."

"Not I, indeed! I know it rather too well, either to set it aloft for adoration or to trample it in the mire. When your faith in me expired, mine was born. Do you recollect that beautiful painted window in Lincoln Cathedral which the unta-

Digitized by Google

tored fingers of an apprentice fashioned out of the despised bits of glass rejected by the fastidious master-builder? It is so vastly superior to every other in the church that the vanquished artist could not survive the chagrin and mortification, and killed himself. My faith is very strong, that, please God, I shall some day show you similar handiwork."

"You grow enigmatical, and I do not fully understand you."

"No; you do not in the least comprehend me. The girl whom you left six months ago has changed in many respects."

"For better, or for worse?"

"Perhaps neither one nor yet the other; but, at least, sir, 'my future will not copy fair my past.'"

"Since my return, I have noticed an alteration in your deportment, which, I regret to say, I cannot consider an improvement; and I should feel inclined to attribute your restless impatience to nervous disease were I not assured by your appearance that you are in perfect health. Remember, that quietude of manner constitutes a woman's greatest charm; and, unfortunately, you seem almost a mimic mælstrom. But, pardon me, I did not intend to lecture you; and, hoping all things, I will patiently wait for the future that you seem to have dedicated to some special object. I will try to have faith in my perverse little friend, though she sometimes renders it a difficult task. May I trouble you to stamp those letters?"

He could not analyze the change that passed swiftly across her face, nor the emotion that made her suddenly clinch her hands till the rosy nails grew purple.

"Dr. Grey, don't you believe that if Judas Iscariot had only resisted the temptation of the thirty pieces of silver, and stood by his master instead of betraying him, that his position in heaven would have been far more exalted than that of Peter, or even of John?"

"That is a question which I have never pondered, and am not prepared to discuss. Why do you propound it?"

She did not answer immediately; and, when she spoke, her glittering eyes softened in their expression, and resembled stars rising through the golden mist of lingering sunset splendor.

Digitized by Google

"God gave you a nobler heart than mine, and left it an easy, pleasant matter for you to be good; while, struggle as I may, I am constantly in danger of tumbling into some slough of iniquity, or setting up false gods for my soul to bow down to. Because it is so much more difficult for me to do right than for you, it is only just that my reward should be correspondingly greater."

"I am neither John nor Peter, nor are you Judas; and only He who knows our mutual faults and follies, our triumphs and defeats in the life-long campaign with sin, can judge us equitably. I am too painfully conscious of my own imperfections not to sympathize earnestly with the temptations that may assail you; and, moreover, we should never lose sight of the fact, —

'What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.'"

"Dr. Grey, you have great confidence in the efficacy of prayer?"

"Yes; for without it human lives are rudderless, drifting to speedy wreck and ruin."

"If I ask a favor, will you grant it?"

"Have I ever denied you anything that you asked?"

"Yes, sir, — your good opinion."

"I knew that had you really desired that, you would long since have rendered it impossible for me to withhold it. But to the point, — what is your petition?"

"I want you to pray for me."

"Salome, are you serious? Are you really in earnest?"

"Mournfully in earnest."

"Then rest satisfied that henceforth you will always have a place in my prayers; but do not forget the greater necessity of praying for yourself. Now, tell me how you have been employed during my long absence. Where are the accumulated exercises which I promised to examine and correct when I returned?"

"Promised whom?"

"You."

"You forget that I did not see you the day you left, and that you did not even bid me good-by."

Digitized by Google

"I referred to your French exercises in a brief and hurried note that I left for you."

"Left where? I never received — never heard of it."

"I laid it upon your plate, where I supposed you would certainly notice it when you came home to dinner."

"Why did not you give it to Miss Jane?"

"Simply because she was not in the room when I wrote it It is rather surprising that it escaped your observation, as I laid it in a conspicuous place."

She did not deem it necessary to inform him that on that unlucky day she had suddenly lost her appetite, and failed to go to the table; and now she put her fingers over her eyes to conceal the blaze of joyful light that irradiated them, as he mentioned the circumstance, comparatively trivial, but precious in her estimation, since it was freighted with the assurance that at least he had thought of her on the eve of his unexpected departure. What inexpressible comfort that note might have contributed during all those tedious months of silence and separation! While she sat there thinking of the dreary afternoon when, down in the orchard-grass she lay upon her face, Dr. Grey came nearer to her, and said, —

"I hope you have not abandoned your French?"

"No, sir; but I devote less time than formerly to it."

"If agreeable to you, we will resume the exercises as soon as I can wield my pen."

"If you can teach me Italian, I should prefer it; especially since I have learned to pronounce French tolerably well?"

"What use do you expect to have for Italian, — at least, at present? French is much more essential."

"I have a good reason for desiring to make the change, though just now I do not choose to be driven into any explanations."

"Pardon me. I had no intention of forcing your confidence. When in Italy, I always contrived to understand and make myself understood; but my knowledge and use of the language is rather too slip-shod to justify my attempting to teach you idioms, hallowed as the medium through which Dante and Ariosto charmed the world. Miss Dexter, Muriel's governess, is a very thorough

Digitized by Google

and accomplished linguist, and speaks Italian not only gracefully but correctly. I have already engaged her to teach you whatever she may deem advisable when she comes here to live."

"You are very kind. Is she a young person?"

"She is a very highly cultivated and elegant woman, probably twenty-five or six years old, and has been in Florence with Muriel."

Involuntarily and unconsciously the orphan sighed, and the muscles in her broad forehead tangled terribly.

"Salome, please put your hand in the right pocket of my vest, and take out a key that ought to be there. No,—not that; a larger steel one. Now you have it. Will you be so good as to open that trunk which came by express yesterday (it is in the upper hall), and bring me a box wrapped in pink tissue-paper? I would not trouble you with so many commissions if I could use my hands."

Unable longer to repress her feelings, the girl exclaimed eagerly,—

"If you could imagine what pleasure it affords me to render you the slightest service, I am very sure you would not annoy me with apologies for making me happy."

In a few moments she returned to the library, bearing in her hand a small but heavy package, which she placed on the table before him.

"Please open it, and examine the contents."

She obeyed him; and, after removing the wrapping, found a blue velvet case that opened with a spring and revealed a parcel enclosed in silver paper. Dr. Grey turned and walked to the window; and, as Salome took off the last covering, a watch and chain met her curious gaze. One side of the former was richly and elaborately chased, and represented Kronos leaning on his scythe; the other was studded with diamonds that flashed out the name "Salome." Astonishment and delight sealed the orphan's lips, and, in silence, far more eloquent than words, she bowed her head upon the table. After a few moments had elapsed, Dr. Grey attempted to steal out of the room; but, being obliged to pass close by her chair, she put out her hand and arrested his movement.

Digitized by Google

"It is the most beautiful watch I have ever seen; but, oh, sir! how shall I sufficiently thank you? How can I express all that is throbbing here in my proud, grateful heart? Although the costly gift is elegant and tasteful, I hold still more precious the fact which it attests, — that during your absence you thought of me. How shall I begin to prove my gratitude for your kindness and generosity?"

"Do not thank me, my little friend; for, indeed I require no verbal assurances that my *souvenir* is kindly received and appreciated. Wear the watch; and let it continually remind you not only of the sincerity of my friendship, but of the far more important fact that every idle or injudiciously employed hour will cry out in accusation against us in the final assize, when we are called upon to render an account of the distribution of that invaluable time which God allows us solely for the accomplishment of His work on earth. It is so exceedingly difficult for young persons to realize how marvellously rapid is the flight of time, that you will, I trust, forgive me if I endeavor to impress upon you the vital importance of making each day fragrant with the burden of some good deed, the resistance of some sore temptation, some service rendered to God or to suffering humanity which shall make your years mellow with the fruitage that will entitle you to a glorious record in the golden book of Abou Ben Adhem's angel. Let this little jewelled monitress of the fleeting, mocking nature of time, this ingenious toy, whose ticking is but the mournful, endless knell of dead seconds, remind you that, —

> "'This life of ours, what is it? A very few
> Soon ended years, and then — the ceaseless psalm,
> And the eternal Sabbath of the soul.'"

As Salome looked up into his tranquil, happy face, two tears glided across her cheeks, and fell upon the pretty bauble.

"You will find a key in the case, and can wind it up, and set it by the clock in the parlor."

"Dr. Grey, are you willing that my watch shall bear daily testimony of something which I hold far above its diamonds, — that you have faith in Salome Owen?"

Digitized by Google

"Perfectly willing that you should make it eloquent with all friendly utterances and sympathy. Hester has bound my arm so tightly that it impedes the circulation, and is very painful. Please loosen the bandage."

She complied as carefully as possible, though her hands trembled; and, when the ligature had been comfortably adjusted and the arm restored to its sling, she stooped and pressed her lips softly and reverently to the cold, white fingers, that protruded from the linen bands. He endeavored ineffectually to prevent the caress, which evidently embarrassed him; but she left two kisses on the bruised hand, and, snatching her watch and chain from the table, hastily quitted the room.

In after years, when loneliness and disappointment pressed heavily upon her heart, she looked back to the three weeks that succeeded Dr. Grey's return as the halcyon days, as the cloudless June morning of her life; and, in blissful retrospection, temporarily found Elysium.

She wrote his letters, read aloud from his favorite books, dressed and bandaged his blistered hand and fractured arm, and surrendered her heart to an intense and perfect happiness such as she had scarcely dared to hope would ever be her portion.

CHAPTER XI.

"BRING her into my office. Steady, men! There may be broken bones, and jarring would be torture. Don't stumble over that book on the floor. Lay her here on the sofa, and throw open the blinds."

"Dr. Grey, is she dead?"

"No, only badly stunned; and the contusion on the head seems to be very severe. Stand back, all of you, and give her air. When did it happen?"

"About twenty minutes ago. She is a stout, heavy woman,

Digitized by Google

and we could not walk very fast with such a burden. Ah! you intend to bleed her?"

"Yes, I fear nothing else will relieve her. Mitchell, hold the arm for me."

"How did she receive this injury?" asked Dr. Mitchell, who had been holding a consultation with Dr. Grey relative to some perplexing case.

"Those gray ponies which we were admiring a half hour since, as they trotted by the door, took fright at a menagerie procession coming up from the dépot to the Hippodrome, — and ran away. In steering clear of the elephant, who was covered from head to foot, and certainly looked frightful, the horses ran into a mass of lumber and brick at the corner of Fountain and Franklin streets, where a new store is being erected, and the carriage was upset. Unfortunately the harness was very strong, and did not give way until the carriage had been dragged some yards among the rubbish, and one of the horses finally floundered into a bed of mortar, and broke the traces. The driver kept his hold upon the reins to the last, but was badly bruised, and this woman was thrown out on a pile of bricks and granite-caps. The municipal authorities should prohibit these menagerie parades, for the meekest plough-horse in the State could scarcely have faced that band of musicians, flanked by the covered elephant and giraffe, and the cages of the beasts, — much less those fiery grays, who seem snuffing danger even when there is no provocation."

"Who is this woman?"

"She is a total stranger to me," answered Dr. Grey, bending down to put his ear to the heart of the victim.

A bystander seemed better informed, and replied, —

"She is a servant or housekeeper of the lady who lives at 'Solitude.' But here comes the driver, limping and making wry faces."

Robert Maclean approached the sofa, and his scratched and bleeding face paled as he leaned over the prostrate form of his mother.

"Oh, doctors, surely two of you can save her! For God's sake, don't let her die! Does she breathe?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes, the bleeding has already benefited her. She breathes regularly, and the action of her heart is better. Sit down, my man,—you look ghastly. Mitchell, give him some brandy, and sew up that gash in his cheek, while I write a prescription."

"Never mind me, doctor; only save my poor mother. She looks like death itself. Mother, mother, it is all over now! Come, wake up, and speak to me!"

He seized one of her cold hands, and chafed it vigorously between both of his, while tears and blood mingled, as they dripped from his face to hers.

"Doctor, tell me the truth; is there any hope?"

"Certainly, my friend; there is every reason to believe she will ultimately recover, though you need not be surprised if she remains for some hours in a heavy stupor. Remember, a pile of brick is not exactly a feather pillow, and it may be some time before the brain recovers from the severity of the contusion. What is your name?"

"Robert Maclean."

"And hers?"

"Elsie Maclean. Poor, dear creature! How she labors in her breathing. Suppose I lift her head?"

"No; let her rest quietly, just as she is, and I trust all will be well. Come to the table, and allow me to put some plaster over that cut which bleeds so freely. Trust me, Maclean, and do not look so woe-begone. I am not deceiving you. There may be serious internal injuries that I have not discovered, but this stupor is not alarming. I can find no fractured bones, and hope the blow on the head is the most troublesome thing we shall have to contend with."

Dr. Grey proceeded to sponge the bruised and stained face; and, hoping to divert the man's anxious thoughts, said, nonchalantly,—

"I believe you are in Mrs. Gerome's employment?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have you been at 'Solitude'?"

"I came here, sir, and bought the place, while she was in

Digitized by Google

Europe. Ah, doctor, if my mother should die, I believe it would kill my mistress."

"You are old family servants?"

"My mother took her when she was twelve hours old, and has never left her since. She loves Mrs. Gerome even better than she loves me — her own flesh and blood. I can't go home and tell my mistress I have nearly killed my mother. She would never endure the sight of me again. Her own mother died the day after she was born, and she has always looked on that poor dear soul yonder as her foster-mother.

Robert limped back to the sofa, and, seating himself on a chair, looked wistfully into his mother's countenance; then hid his face in his hands.

"Come, be a man, Maclean; and don't give way to nervousness! Your mother's condition is constantly improving, though of course it is not so apparent to you as to me. What has been done with the carriage and horses?"

"Oh, the carriage is a sweet pudding; and the grays — curses on 'em! — are badly bruised. One of them had his flank laid open by a saw lying on a lumber-pile; and I only wish it had sawed across the jugular. They are vicious brutes as ever were bitted, and it makes my blood run cold sometimes to see their devilish antics when Mrs. Gerome insists on driving them. They will break her neck, if I don't contrive to break theirs first."

"I should judge from their appearance that it was exceedingly unsafe for any lady to attempt to control them. They seem very fiery and unmanageable. What has been done with them?"

"The deuce knows! — knocked in the head, I trust. I asked two men, who were in the crowd, to take them to the livery-stable. Mrs. Gerome is not afraid of anything, and one of her few pleasures is driving those gray imps, who know her voice as well as I do. I have seen them put up their narrow ears and neigh when she was a hundred yards off; and sometimes she wraps the reins around her wrists and quiets them, when their eyes look like balls of fire. But Rarey himself could not have stopped them a while ago, when they determined to run over

Digitized by Google

that menagerie show. My mistress will say it was my fault, and she will stand by the gray satans through thick and thin. Hist, doctor, my mother groans!"

"Would it not be best for you to go home and acquaint Mrs. Gerome with what has occurred?"

"I would not face her without my mother for — twenty kingdoms! You have no idea how she loves her 'old Elsie,' and I couldn't break the news to her, — I would sooner break my head."

"This is not a proper place for your mother, and I advise you to remove her to the hospital, which is not very far from my office. She can be carried on a litter."

"Oh, my mistress would never permit that! She will let no one else nurse my mother; and, of course, she could not go to a public place like a hospital, for you know she is so dreadfully shy of strangers."

After many suggestions, and much desultory conversation, it was finally decided that Elsie should be placed on a mattress, in the bottom of an open wagon, and carried slowly home. A careful driver was provided, and when Dr. Grey had seen his patient comfortably arranged, and established Robert on the seat with the driver, he yielded to the solicitations of the son, that he would precede them to "Solitude," and acquaint Mrs. Gerome with the details of the accident.

Although ten months had elapsed since the latter took possession of her new home, so complete had been her seclusion that she remained an utter stranger; and, when visitors flocked from town and neighborhood to satisfy themselves concerning the rumors of the elegant furniture and appointments of the house, they were invariably denied admittance, and informed that since her widowhood Mrs. Gerome had not re-entered society.

Curiosity was piqued, and gossip wagged her hundred busy tongues over the tormenting fact that Mrs. Gerome had never darkened the church-door since her arrival; and, occasionally, when she rode into town, wore a thick veil that thoroughly screened her features; and, instead of shopping like other people,

Digitized by Google

made Elsie Maclean bring the articles to the carriage for her inspection.

The servants seemed to hold themselves as much aloof as their mistress, and though Robert and his mother attended service regularly every Sabbath, they appeared as gravely silent and ungregarious as Sphinxes. The ministers of various denominations called to pay their respects to the stranger, but only the clerical cards succeeded in crossing the threshold; and, while rumors of her boundless wealth crept teasingly through Newsmongerdom, no one except Salome Owen had yet seen the new-comer.

Cases of books and pictures occasionally arrived from Europe, and never failed to stir the pool of gossip to its dregs; for the wife of the express-agent was an intimate friend of Mrs. Spiewell, whose husband was pastor of the church which Elsie and Robert attended, and who felt personally aggrieved that the Rev. Charles Spiewell was not welcomed as the spiritual guide of the mistress of "Solitude."

Finally, a morbid, meddling inquisitiveness goaded the chatty little woman beyond the bounds of ministerial decorum, and, having rashly wagered a pair of gloves that she would gain an entrance to the parlors (whereof the upholsterer's wife told marvellous tales), she armed herself with a pathetic petition for aid to build a "Widow's Row," and, with a subscription-list for a "Dorcas Society," and confident of ingress, boldly rang the bell. Unfortunately, Elsie chanced that day to be on post as sentinel, and, though she immediately recognized the visitor as the mother of the small colony of Spiewells who crowded every Sunday morning into the pew of the pastor, she courtesied, and gave the stereotyped rebuff, —

"Mrs. Gerome begs to be excused."

"Ah, indeed! But she does not know who has called, or she would make an exception in my favor. I am your minister's wife, and must really see her, if only for two minutes. Take my card to her, and say I call on important business, which cannot fail to interest her."

Digitized by Google

Not a muscle of Elsie's grave face moved, as she received the card, and answered, —

"I am very sorry, madam, but Mrs. Gerome sees no visitors, and my orders are positive."

Mrs. Spiewell bit her lip, and reddened.

"Then take these papers to her, and ask if she will please be so good as to examine their claims to her charity. In the mean time I will wait in the parlor, and must trouble you for a glass of water."

She thrust the petitions into Elsie's hand, and attempted to slip into the hall, through the partial opening of the door which the servant held during the parley; but, planting her massive frame directly in the way, the resolute woman effectually barred entrance, and, pointing to an iron *tête-à-tête* on the portico, said, decisively, —

"I beg pardon, madam, but you will find a seat there; and I will bring the water while Mrs. Gerome reads your letters. If you are fatigued, I will hand you luncheon and some wine."

Mortified and enraged, Mrs. Spiewell grew scarlet, but threw herself into the seat designated, resolved to snatch a glimpse of the interior the instant the servant had disappeared.

Very softly Elsie closed and securely latched the door on the inside, knowing that at that moment her mistress was sitting in the oriel window of the front parlor.

In vain the visitor tried and twisted the bolt, and, completely baffled, tears of chagrin moistened her eyes. She had scarcely time to regain her seat, when Elsie reappeared, bearing on a handsome salver a wine-glass, silver goblet, and an elegant basket filled with cake.

"Mrs. Gerome presents her compliments, and sends you this fifty dollar bill for whatever society you represent."

Too thoroughly discomfited to conceal her pique and indignation, Mrs. Spiewell snatched letters and donation, and, without lingering an instant, swept haughtily down the steps, "shaking off the dust of her feet" against "Solitude" and its incorrigible owner.

An innocent impertinence once coldly frustrated soon takes unto itself a sting and branding-irons, and thus, what was

Digitized by Google

originally merely idle curiosity, becomes bitter malice; and henceforth the worthy minister's gossiping wife lost no opportunity of inveighing against the superciliousness of the stranger, and of insinuating that some very extraordinary circumstances led her "to fear that something was radically wrong about that poor Mrs. Gerome, for troubles that could not be poured into the sympathetic ears of pastors and of pastors' wives must be very dark, indeed."

Whenever the name of the new-comer was mentioned, Mrs. Spiewell compressed her lips, shook her head, and shrugged her round shoulders; and, of course, persons present surmised that the "minister's lady" was acquainted with melancholy facts which charity prevented her from divulging.

Many of the grievances and ills that afflict society spring not from sinful, envenomed hearts, but from weak souls and empty heads; and Mrs. Spiewell, who sat up with all the measle-stricken, teething, sick children in her husband's charge, and would have felt disgraced had she missed a meeting of the "Dorcas Society," or of the "Barefeet Relief Club," would have been duly shocked if any one had boldly charged her with slandering a woman whom she had never seen, and of whose antecedents she knew absolutely nothing. Verily, it is difficult, indeed, even for "the elect" to keep themselves "unspotted from the world;" and Zimmerman was a seer when he declared, "Who lives with wolves must join in their howls."

Absorbed by professional engagements, or fiscal cares, the gentlemen of a community are rarely interested in or informed of the last wreck of character which the whirlpool of scandal strews on the strand of society; but vague rumors relative to Mrs. Gerome's isolation had penetrated even into the quiet precincts of Dr. Grey's sanctum, and consequently invested his present mission with extraneous interest.

For the first time since her arrival he approached the confines of her residence, and, as he threw the reins over the dashboard of his buggy and stood under the lofty old trees that surrounded the house, he paused to admire the beauty of the grounds, the

Digitized by Google

grouping of some statues and pot-plants on a neighboring mound, and the far-stretching sheen of the rippling sea.

No living thing was visible except a golden pheasant and scarlet flamingo strutting along the stone terrace at the foot of the lawn, and silence and repose seemed brooding over house and yard; when suddenly a rapid, passionate, piano-prelude s note the stillness till the air appeared to throb and quiver, and a thrillingly sweet yet intensely mournful voice sang the wailing strains of *Addio del Passato.*

The indescribable yet almost overwhelming pathos of the tones affected Dr. Grey much as the tremolo-stop in some organ-overture in a dimly-lighted cathedral; and, as the singer seemed to pour her whole aching heart and wearied soul into the concluding "*Ah! tutto-tutto fini!*" he turned, and involuntarily followed the sound, like one in a dream.

The front door was closed; but the sash of the oriel window had been raised, and through the delicate lace curtains that were swaying in the salt breath of ocean he could see what passed in the parlor. A woman sat before the piano, running her snowy fingers idly across the keys, now striking *fortissimo* a wild stormy *fugue* theme, and then softly evoking a subtle minor chord that seemed the utterance of some despairing spirit breathing its last prayer for peace.

Her Marie-Louise blue dress was girded at the waist by a belt and buckle of silver, and the loose sleeve of the right arm was looped and pinned up, showing the dimpled elbow and daintily rounded wrist encircled by the jet serpent. Around her throat she had carelessly thrown a lace handkerchief, and, from the mass of hair that seemed tiny, snow-capped waves, a cluster of blue nemophila leaned down to touch the white forehead beneath, and peep at the answering blue gleams in the large, shining, steely eyes. Her fingers strayed listlessly into a *Nocturne;* but from the dreamy expression of the face, upraised to gaze at the busts on the brackets above, it was evident that her thoughts had wandered far away from *Addio del Passato*, and were treading the drift-strewn strands of melancholy memory.

Presently she rose, walked twice across the room, and came

Digitized by Google

back to an *étagére* where stood an azure Bohemian glass vase, supported by silver Tritons, and filled with late blue hyacinths and early pancratiums.

Bending her regal head, she inhaled the mingled perfumes, worthy of Sicilian or Cyprian meadows; and, while her slight fingers toyed with the fragile petals, a proud smile lent its sad light to the chill face, and she said aloud, as if striving to comfort herself, —

> "'Not the ineffable stars that interlace
> The azure canopy of Zeus himself
> Have surer sweetness than my hyacinths
> When they grow blue, in gazing on blue heaven,
> Than the white lilies of my rivers, when
> In leafy spring Selene's silver horn
> Spills paleness, peace, and fragrance.'"

With a heavy sigh she turned away, and sat down in the rear room, near the arch, where an easel now stood, containing a large, unfinished picture; and, taking her ivory palette and brushes, she began to retouch the violet robe of one of the figures.

Dr. Grey had seen more beautiful women among the gilded pillars and frescoes of palaces, and amid the olives and vineyards of Parthenope; but in Mrs. Gerome he found a fascinating mystery that baffled analysis and riveted his attention. Neither young nor old, she had crowned herself with the glories of both seasons, and seemed some sweet, dewy spring, wrapped in the snows and frozen in the icy garb of winter.

He had expected to meet a middle-aged person, habited in widows' weeds, and meek from the severe scourging of a recent and terrible bereavement; but that anomalous white face and proud, queenly form were unlike all other flesh that his keen eyes had hitherto scanned; and he regarded her as curiously as he would have examined some abnormal-looking specimen of nerves and muscles laid upon the marble slab of a dissecting-table.

Recollecting suddenly that, if he did not present himself, the

Digitized by Google

wagon would arrive before he had accomplished the object of his visit, he drew a card from his pocket, and, stepping over the low sill of the oriel window, advanced to the arch.

The mistress of the house sat with her back turned towards him, and was apparently absorbed in putting purple shadows into the folds of a mantle that hung from the shoulders of a kneeling figure on the canvas.

Face-downward on an ottoman near, lay a beautiful copy of Owen Meredith's poems; and, after a few seconds, she paused, brush in hand, and, taking up the book, slowly read aloud — glancing, as she did so, from page to picture, —

> . . . . . "'Then I could perceive
> A glory pouring through an open door,
> And in the light five women. I believe
> They wore white vestments, all of them. They were
> Quite calm; and each still face unearthly fair,
> Unearthly quiet. So like statues all,
> Waiting they stood without that lighted hall;
> And in their hands, like a blue star, they held
> Each one a silver lamp.'"

Standing immediately behind her, Dr. Grey saw that she had seized the weird "*Vision of Virgins*," and was putting into pigment that solemn phantasm of the poet's imagination where five radiant women were passing to their reward, — and five wailing over flickering, dying lamps, were huddled helplessly and hopelessly under a black and starless midnight sky. Although unfinished, there was marvellous power in the picture, and the sickly gleam from the expiring wicks made the surrounding gloom more supernatural, like the deep shadows skulking behind the lurid glare in some old Flemish painting.

He saw also that she had followed the general outline of the poem; but one of the faces was so supreme in its mute anguish that he thought of Reni's "Cenci," and of a wan "Alcestis," and a desperate "Cassandra," he had seen at Rome; and, in comparison, the description of the poet seemed almost vapid, —

Digitized by Google

. . . . . "One as still as death
Hollowed her hands about her lamp, for fear
Some motion of the midnight, or her breath,
Should fan out the last flicker. Rosy clear
The light oozed through her fingers o'er her face.
There was a ruined beauty hovering there
Over deep pain, and dasht with lurid grace
A waning bloom."

The room with its costly, quaint, and tasteful furniture,—the solitary and singularly beautiful woman; the wonderful picture, growing beneath her hand; the solemn silence, broken only by the deep, hollow murmur of the dimpling sea that sent its shimmer in at the window to meet the painted shimmer in a marine view framed on the wall,—all these wove a spell about the intruder that temporarily held him a mute captive.

The artist laid a delicate green on the stripped and scattered leaves from a wreath of Syrian lilies lying on the marble steps of the bridegroom's mansion, and once more she read a passage from the open book,—

. . . . . "'Then I beheld
A shadow in the doorway. And One came
Crown'd for a feast. I could not see the Face.
The Form was not all human. As the flame
Streamed over it, a presence took the place
With awe. He, turning, took them by the hand
And led them each up the white stairway, and
The door closed.'"

The sound of her voice, low but clear, and burdened with a sadness that no language could exhaust or interpret, thrilled Dr. Grey's steady nerves as no music had ever done, and, stepping forward, he held out his card, and said,—

"Mrs. Gerome, a painful necessity has compelled me to intrude upon your seclusion, and I trust you will acquit me of impertinence."

Rising, she fronted him with a frown severe as that which clouded Artemis' brow when profane eyes peered through myrtle boughs into her sacred retreat, and the changed voice seemed thick with bristling icicles.

Digitized by Google

"Your business must be imperative, indeed, if it warrants this intrusion. What servant admitted you?"

"None. I came in haste, and, seeing the window open, entered without ringing. Madam, my card will explain my errand."

"Has Dr. Grey an unpaid bill? I was not aware the servants had needed your services; but if so, present your claim to Robert Maclean, my agent."

"Mrs. Gerome owes me nothing, and I came here reluctantly and in compliance with Robert Maclean's request, to inform her of an accident which happened this afternoon while —"

He paused, awed by the change that swept over her countenance, filling it with horrible dread.

"Those gray horses?"

"Yes, madam."

"Not Elsie? Oh! don't tell me that my dear old Elsie was mangled! Hush! I will not hear it!"

Palette and brushes fell upon the carpet, and she wrung her fingers until the diamond-eyed asp set its blue fangs in her cold flesh.

"Robert was merely bruised, but his mother was very badly injured, and is still insensible. Every precaution has been taken to counteract the effect of the severe blow on her head, and I hope that after an hour or two she will recover her consciousness. Robert is bringing her home as carefully as possible, and you may expect them momentarily. Only his urgent entreaties that I would precede him and prepare you for the reception of his mother could have induced me to waive ceremony and thrust myself into the presence of a lady who seems little disposed to pardon the apparent presumption of my visit."

She evidently did not heed his words, and, suddenly clasping her hands across her forehead, she said, bitterly, —

"Coward! why can't you speak out, and tell me that the corpse will soon be here, and a coffin must be ordered? This is the last blow! Surely, God will let me alone, now; for there is nothing more that He can send to afflict me. Oh, Elsie, — my sole comfort! The only one who ever loved me!"

Digitized by Google

A bluish pallor settled about her mouth, and Dr. Grey shuddered as he looked into the dry, defiant eyes, so beautiful in form and color but so mournfully desperate in their expression.

"Mrs. Gerome, your servant is neither dead nor dying, and I have told you the worst. Down the road I can see the wagon coming slowly, and I would advise you to call the household together, in order to assist in lifting Elsie, who is very stout and heavy. Calm yourself, madam, and trust your favorite servant to my care."

"Servant! Sir, she is mother, father, husband, friends, — all, — everything to me! She is the only human being who cares for, or understands, or sympathizes with me, — and I could not live without her. Oh, sir, do not ask me to trust you! The time has gone by when I could trust anybody but Elsie. You are a physician, — you ought to know what should be done for her; and, Dr. Grey, if you have any pity in your soul, and any skill in your profession, save my old Elsie's life! Dr. Grey —"

She paused a few seconds, and added, in a whisper, —

"If she dies, I am afraid I might grow desperate, and commit what you happy people call a crime."

He felt an unwonted moisture dim his eyes, as he watched the delicate face, white as the hair that crowned it, and wondered if the wide, populous world could match her regal form and perfect features.

"Mrs. Gerome, I think I can promise that Elsie will recover from her injuries; but a prayer for her safety would bring you more comfort than my feeble words of assurance and encouragement. The mercy of God is surer than the combined medical skill of the universe."

"The mercy of God!" she repeated, with a gesture of scorn and impatience. "No, no! God set his face like a flint against me, long, long ago, and I do not mock myself by offering prayers that only call down smitings upon me. Seven years since I prayed my last prayer, which was for speedy death; and, from that hour, I seem to have taken a new lease on life. Now I stand still and keep silent, and I hoped that God had forgotten me."

Digitized by Google

She covered her face with her hands, and Dr. Grey drew a chair close to her and endeavored to make her sit down, but she resisted and shrank from his touch on her arm.

"Madam, the wagon has stopped at the door. Will you direct your servants, or shall I?"

"If she is not dead, tell Robert to carry her into my room. Oh, Dr. Grey, you will not let her die!"

As she looked up imploringly into his calm, noble face, she met his earnest gaze, brimming with compassion and sympathy, and her lips and chin quivered.

"Trust your God, and have faith in me."

He went out to assist in removing his patient, and when they had carried the mattress and its occupant into the room opposite the parlor and laid it on the carpet near the window, he had the satisfaction of observing a favorable change in Elsie's condition. While he stood by a table preparing some medicine, Robert stole up, and asked:

"Do you notice any improvement? She groaned twice on the road, and once I am sure she opened her eyes."

"Yes; I think that very soon she will be able to speak, for her pulse is gaining strength every hour."

"How did my mistress take it?"

"She was much shocked and grieved. Maclean, where are her friends and relatives?"

There was no reply, and, glancing over his shoulder to repeat the inquiry, Dr. Grey saw Mrs. Gerome leaning against the door.

"Robert, have you killed her?"

"Oh, no, ma'am! She is doing very well, the doctor says."

She crossed the room, and sat down on the edge of the mattress, taking one of the large brown hands in both of hers and bending her face over the pillow.

"Elsie! mother! Elsie, speak to your poor child!"

That wailing voice pierced the stupor, and Dr. Grey was surprised to see the woman's eyes unclose and rest wonderingly upon the countenance hovering over her.

Digitized by Google

"My dear Elsie, don't you know me?"

"Yes, my bairn. What ails you?"

She spoke indistinctly, and shut her eyes once more, as if exhausted.

"If she was in her coffin, I verily believe she would rise, if she heard your voice calling her," said Robert, wiping away the tears of joy that trickled across his sunburnt cheeks.

Dr. Grey stooped to put his finger on Elsie's pulse, and Mrs. Gerome threw herself down on the carpet, and buried her face in the pillow, where her silver hair mingled with the grizzled locks that straggled from beneath the old woman's torn lace cap.

CHAPTER XII.

"WELL, Ulpian, are you convinced that 'Solitude' is an unlucky place, and that misfortune dogs the steps of all who make it a home? Once you laughed at my 'superstition.' What think you now, my wiseacre?"

"My opinion has not changed, except that each time I see the place I admire it more and more; and, were it for sale, I should certainly purchase it."

"Not with the expectation of living there?"

"Most assuredly."

Miss Jane had suspended for a moment the swift clicking of her knitting-needles in order to hear her brother's reply, and now she rejoined, almost sharply,—

"You will do no such silly thing while there is breath left in my body to protest, or to persuade. Pooh! you only talk to tease me; for five grains of observation and common sense will teach you that there is a curse hanging over that old piratical nest."

"Dear Janet, when headstrong drivers persist in carrying a pair of fiery, vicious horses into the midst of a procession of

Digitized by Google

wild beasts that would have scared even your sober dull Dapples out of their lazy jog-trot, it is not at all surprising that snapped harness, broken carriage, torn flesh, and strained joints should attest the folly of the experiment. The accident occurred not far from my office, which is haunted by nothing worse than your harmless sailor-boy."

"All very fine, my blue-eyed oracle, but I notice that the horses belonging to 'Solitude' were the only ones that made mischief and came to grief; and I promise you that all the hawsers in Gosport Navy-Yard will never drag me inside the doomed place. How is your patient? If you expect her to get well, you had better take a 'superstitious' old woman's counsel, and send her away from that valley of Jehoshaphat."

"I am very sorry to tell you that she was more seriously hurt than I was at first inclined to believe. Her spine was so badly injured that although there is no danger of immediate death, she will never be able to sit up or walk again. She may linger many months, possibly years; but must, as long as life lasts, remain a bed-ridden cripple. It is one of the saddest cases I have had to deal with during my professional career; and Elsie Maclean bears her sufferings with such noble fortitude, such genuine Christian patience, coupled with stern Scotch heroism, that I cannot withhold my admiration and earnest sympathy. Yesterday I held a consultation with four physicians, and, when we told her the hopelessness of her condition, she received the announcement without even a sigh, and seemed only to dread that instead of an assistant she might prove a burden to her mistress."

"She appears to be a very important personage in the household."

"Yes; she is Mrs. Gerome's nurse, housekeeper, and counsellor, — and I have rarely seen such warm affection as exists between them. I wish, Janet, that you were strong enough to call at 'Solitude,' for its mistress leads a lonely, secluded life, and must require some society."

"But, Ulpian, I hear strange things about her, and it is hinted that she is deranged."

Digitized by Google

"Your knowledge of human nature should teach you how little truth is generally found in the floating *on dits* of social circles."

"How long has she been widowed?"

"I do not know, but presume that her affliction has not been very recent, as she wears no mourning."

"If she has discarded widow's weeds, and dresses in colors, why should she taboo society, and make herself the town-talk by refusing to receive even the clergy and their wives? She has lived here ten months, and I understand from Dolly Spiewell that not a soul has ever seen her. Of course such eccentricities provoke gossip and tickle the tongue of scandal, and if the world can't find out the real cause of such conduct, it very industriously sets to work and manufactures one."

"Which, in my humble opinion, constitutes a piece of unwarrantable impertinence on the part of meddling Mrs. Grundy. The world might be more profitably engaged in mending its own tortuous and mendacious ways, and allowing poor solitary wretches to fondle their whims and caprices. If Mrs. Gerome does not choose to receive visitors, what right has the public to grumble, or even discuss the matter?"

As Salome spoke, she plunged her stiletto vigorously into a piece of cambric, and her thin lip curled contemptuously.

"Abstractly true, my dear child; but, from the beginning of time, people have meddled; and, since gossip she must, even Eve chatted too freely with serpents. Besides, since we are in the world, we should not turn eremites, and bristle at the sight of one of our own race; for society has a few laws that are inexorable, — that cannot be violated without subjecting the offender to being stung to death by venomous tongues; and one of these statutes is, that all shall see and be seen, shall talk and be talked about, and shall visit and be visited. When a woman unaccountably turns recluse, she is at the mercy of public imagination, stimulated by disappointed curiosity; and very soon the verdict goes forth that she is either deformed or deranged."

"I dispute the prerogative of the public to dictate in such

Digitized by Google

matters, and I shall rebel whenever it presumes to lay even a little finger across my path. What, pray tell me, is the world, but an aggregation of persons like you and me, and what possible concern can you or I have with the fact that Mrs. Gerome burrows like a mole, beyond our sight? If she sees fit to found a modern sect of Troglodytes, I can't understand that the wheels of society are thereby scotched, or that the public has a shadow of right to raise a hue-and-cry and strive to unearth her, as if she were a fox, a catamount, or a gopher. It is useless for society to constitute itself a turning-lathe for rounding off all individual angularities, and grinding people down to dull uniformity until they are as indistinguishable as a bag of unpainted marbles or of black-eyed peas; and, if God had intended that we should all invariably think, feel, and act after one pattern, He would have populated the world with Siamese twins; whereas, the first couple that were born on earth were so dissimilar that all the universe was not wide enough to hold them both, and manslaughter began when the race only numbered a quartette. If mankind had not arrogated the privilege of being its 'brother's keeper,' it would never have been forced to deny the fact. I admire the honesty and truth with which Alexander Smith bravely confessed, 'I love a little eccentricity; I respect honest prejudices. It is high time, it seems to me, that a moral game-law were passed for the preservation of the wild and vagrant feelings of human nature.'"

"That is a dangerous doctrine, my dear child, especially for a woman to entertain; because custom rules us with an iron rod, and flays us alive if we contravene her decrees."

"I should be exceedingly glad to learn by what authority or process Truth is provided with sex? Are some orthodox doctrines female and others male? Why have not we women as clear a right to any given set of principles as men? Truth is as much my property as that of the Czar of Russia, and, if I choose to lay hold of any special province of it, why must I perforce be dragged to the whipping-post of custom, simply because by an accident I am called Susan or Hepzibah instead of Peter or Lazarus? So long as my convictions of truth

Digitized by Google

(which custom brands as vagaries) are innocuous, I have a perfect and inalienable right to indulge them; but the instant I become pestiferous to society, let me be consigned to the tender mercies of strait-jacket and insane-asylum regimen. If I creep quietly along my own intellectual and ethical trail, taking heed not to touch the sensitive toes of custom, why should it ungenerously insist upon bruising mine? My seer was right when he boldly declared, 'The world has stood long enough under the drill of Adjutant Fashion. It is hard work, the posture is wearisome, and Fashion is an awful martinet, and has a quick eye, and comes down mercilessly on the unfortunate wight who can not square his toes to the approved pattern. It is killing work. Suppose we try 'standing at ease' for a little while?' Wherefore, custom to the contrary notwithstanding, I contend that Mrs. Gerome has as indisputable a right to refuse admittance to Rev. Mrs. Spiewell as any anchorite of the Nitrian Sands to decline receiving a bevy of inquisitive European belles. If society rules like Russia or Turkey, then am I a candidate for knout and bastinado. I do not wish to be unwomanly, and honesty and candor are not necessarily unfeminine, because some coarse, rough-handed, bold-eyed woman has possibly rendered them unpopular."

Miss Jane laid down her knitting, folded her hands, and, as she watched the girl, her emotions were probably similar to those that agitate some meek and staid hen, who, leading a young brood of ducks from her nest, suddenly beholds them displaying their aquatic proclivities by plunging into the horse-pond, and performing all the evolutions of a regatta.

"Ah, child, I fear you think too little of what you wish or intend to make yourself!"

"Only have patience, Miss Jane, and some day I will show you all the graces of Griselda and Gudrun the second. Dr Grey, have you seen Mrs. Gerome?"

"Yes, — on two occasions."

"Is she not the most extraordinary and puzzling person you ever looked at?"

"When and where could you have met her?"

Digitized by Google

"For a few minutes only, last winter, I saw her on the beach, near 'Solitude.' We exchanged a half-dozen words, and she left an impression on my mind which all time will not efface. Since that evening I have frequently endeavored to surprise her on the same spot, but only once I succeeded in catching a glimpse of a blue shawl that fluttered in the distance. She seemed to me a beautiful, pale priestess, consecrated to the ministry of the shrine of sorrow; and, when I hear snubbed-dom sneering at her, and remember the hopeless expression with which her wonderful, homeless eyes looked out across that grey, silent sea, — I cannot avoid thinking that she is very wise in barring her doors, and heeding the advice of Montenebi, '*Complain not of thy woes to the public: they will no more pity thee than birds of prey pity the wounded deer.*'"

"My acquaintance with Mrs. Gerome is too slight to warrant the utterance of an opinion relative to her idiosyncrasies, but I am afraid cynicism rather than grief immures her from society. Her prematurely white hair and the remarkable pallor of her smooth complexion combine to render her appearance piquant and unnatural; and, certainly, there is something in her face strangely suggestive of old Norse myths, mystery, and magic. Her features, when analyzed, prove faultlessly regular, but her life is out of tune, and the expression of her countenance mars what would otherwise be perfect beauty. I can, in some degree, describe the impression she produced upon me by quoting the lines that were suggested when I saw her this morning, standing by Elsie Maclean's bed, —

'I saw a vision of a woman, where
Night and new morning strive for domination;
Incomparably pale, and almost fair,
And sad beyond expression.
Her eyes were like some fire-enshrining gem,
Were stately, like the stars, and yet were tender;
Her figure charmed me, like a windy stem,
Quivering, and drooped, and slender.
She measured measureless sorrow toward its length,
And breadth, and depth, and height.'"

Digitized by Google

Salome looked up from the eyelet she was working, but Dr. Grey had turned his head towards his sister who had fallen asleep in her chair, and the orphan could not see his face.

"Mrs. Gerome must have been very young when she married, and —"

"Hush! Janet looks so weary that I want her to have a long nap, and our voices might disturb her."

He took his hat and gloves and left the room, and Salome forgot her embroidery and fell into a reverie that proved neither pleasant nor profitable, and lasted until Miss Jane awoke.

In the afternoon of the following day, when the orphan returned from her clandestine visit to the Italian musician, she saw an unusual number of persons on the front gallery, and found that the long-expected party from New York had arrived during her absence. Miss Jane was talking to the governess — a meek-looking, but exceedingly handsome woman, of twenty-seven or eight years, with fair hair and quiet brown eyes; and every detail of her dress, speech, and bearing averred that Edith Dexter was no humble scion of proletariat. Her polished yet reserved manners bespoke high birth and aristocratic associations; but something in the composed, sad countenance, in the listless drooping of the pretty head, hinted that she had long since spilt the rosy sparkling foam of her cup of life, and was patiently drinking its muddy lees.

On the upper step sat Dr. Grey, with his arm encircling the form of his ward, whose head rested very confidingly against his shoulder. Muriel Manton was dressed in deep mourning, and had evidently been weeping, for her guardian was tenderly wiping the tears from her cheek when Salome came up the avenue; and, with a keen, jealous pang that she had never felt before, the latter scanned the stranger's claims to beauty.

Very black eyes, brilliant complexion, and fine teeth, she certainly possessed; but her features were rather coarse; her mouth was much too large for classic requirements; and Salome was rejoiced to find her nose indisputably *retroussé*.

Years hence she would doubtless be a large, well-formed,

Digitized by Google

conveying woman, who could exhibit Lyons silk or Genoese velvet to the best advantage, and would be considered a fine-looking, rosy, robust personage; but at present the face, which from under a small straw hat anxiously watched hers, was infinitely handsomer, more attractive, more delicate, and intellectual; and the miller's child felt that she had little to apprehend from the merely personal charms of the wealthy ward.

Salome felt injured as she eyed the doctor's arm, which had never touched even her shoulder; and it was painful and humiliating to notice the affectionate manner in which his hand stroked one of Muriel's that lay on his knee, — and to remember that his fingers had not met hers in a friendly grasp since long before his visit to Europe, — had only clasped hers twice during their acquaintance.

"Come in, Salome, and let me introduce you to my ward Muriel, and to Miss Dexter, who is prepared to receive you as a pupil."

Muriel silently held out her hand; but Salome only bowed and run lightly up the steps, as if she did not perceive the outstretched fingers. Miss Dexter rose and advanced to meet her, saying, in a tone that indexed great kindness of heart,—

"I am exceedingly glad to meet you, Miss Salome; for Dr. Grey has promised that I shall find in you a most exemplary and agreeable pupil."

"Thank you. I am indeed glad to hear that he has changed his opinion of me; and I must endeavor not to lose my newly acquired amiable character, — but he was rather rash to stand security for my good behavior."

She saw that Dr. Grey was surprised at her cold reception of his pet and *protegé*, and perversity took possession of her. Going to the back of Miss Jane's old-fashioned rocking chair she put her arms around her, and, leaning over, kissed her cheek several times. It was not her habit to caress any one or any thing, — not even her little brother, — and this unusual demonstrativeness puzzled and surprised the old lady who said, fondly,—

Digitized by Google

"I presume Ulpian is brave enough to encounter all the risks of standing security for your obedience and docility."

"Certainly I appreciate his chivalry, since none knows better than he the danger — nay, probability, of a forfeiture of the contract on my part."

Dr. Grey rose, and, looking steadily at her, said, in a tone which she well understood, —

"Promises are, in my estimation, peculiarly sacred things; and that which I made to Miss Dexter in your behalf was based upon one that I gave you some time since, namely, that I would have faith in you. Come with me, Muriel; I want to show you and Miss Dexter the finest cow this side of Ayrshire, and some sheep that are handsome enough to compare favorably with the best that ever browsed in the 'Court of Lions.'"

He took his ward's hand and led her away to the cattle-yard, whither Miss Dexter accompanied them.

As Salome looked after the trio her eyes flashed and scarlet spots burned on her cheeks, while a feeling of suffocation oppressed her heart.

"Why will you vex him, when you know that he tries so hard to like you?" asked Miss Jane in a distressed tone, stroking the girl's hot face, as she spoke.

The head was instantly lifted beyond her reach, and the answer came swiftly, sharp and defiant, —

"Do you mean to say that it is so extremely difficult for him to tolerate me?"

"You are obliged to know that you are not one of his favorites, like that sweet-tempered Muriel, to whom he seems so warmly attached; and it is all your own fault, for he was disposed to like you when he first came home. Ulpian loves quiet and amiable people, who are never rude and snappish; and it appears to me that you are trying to see how hateful and spiteful you can be. Why upon earth did you not shake hands with those strangers, and treat them politely?"

"Because I don't choose to be hypocritical, — and I don't like Miss Muriel Manton."

Digitized by Google

"Nonsense! Stuff! I only wish you were half as well-bred and courteous, and lady-like."

"Do you, really? Then, to be obedient and, oblige you, when they come back, I will imitate her example, and throw myself into Dr. Grey's arms, and rub my cheek against his shoulder, and fondle his hands. If this be 'lady-like,' then, indeed, I penitently cry '*peccavi!*' and promise that in future you shall not have cause to complain of me."

"Pooh, pooh, child! What ails you? Muriel has known Ulpian all her life, and looks upon him now as her father. He has petted her since she was a little girl, and loves her almost as well as if she were his child, instead of his ward. You know she is an orphan; and it is very natural for her to cling to her guardian, who was for a great many years her father's most intimate friend."

"We are both orphans, and she is certainly not my junior; yet your propriety would be shocked if I behaved as she does. Where is Stanley?"

"Studying his geography lesson, with the assistance of the globe, in the library. What do you want with him?"

"I am going to the beach, and wish him to walk with me."

"It is too late for you to start for the sea-side, and, moreover, it would appear very discourteous in you to absent yourself the first evening that these strangers spend here. Ulpian would be displeased."

"According to your statement a few minutes since, that is his chronic condition, as far as I am concerned; and, as I do not belong to the mimosa species, I think I may brave his frowns."

"That is not the worst you have to apprehend. Child, I think it would be bitter indeed, to bear Ulpian Grey's contempt."

"I shall take care not to deserve it; and Dr. Grey never forgets to be just."

"My dear little girl, what right have you to be jealous of his love for his young ward?"

The flame that was slowly dying out of her face leaped up fiercer than before, and she crimsoned to the edges of her hair.

Digitized by Google

"Jealous! Good heavens, Miss Jane, you must be dreaming! I merely question the taste that allows his 'lady-like' favorite to caress him so openly, and should not have expressed my disapprobation so strongly if you had not rated me soundly, and held her up as a model for my humble imitation. If she and her governess are to stir up strife between you and me, I shall heartily wish them a speedy passage to Halifax or heaven. Beyond all peradventure I shall get murderously jealous if you dare to give this sloe-eyed, peony-faced girl, my place in your dear old heart. She, of course, will fondle her guardian as much as she pleases, or as often as he sees fit to allow; but woe unto her if I catch her hands and lips about you, my dearest and best friend! Don't scold me and praise her, or some fine day I shall jump at and strangle her, which you know would not be 'well-bred' or 'lady-like,' much less moral and Christian."

She almost smothered the old lady in her arms, and kissed her several times.

"What has stirred up the evil spirit in you? You look as wicked as your mother Herodias, thirsting for the blood of John the Baptist; or as Jezebel plotting against the prophet —"

"And telling me that like her I am 'going to the dogs' is not the surest way to reform me. Stanley! Stanley! get your hat and come here."

"Your awful temper will be your ruin if you don't put a curb-bit on it. See here, Salome, don't be so utterly silly and childish! I do not wish you to go to the sea-shore this evening."

"Please, Miss Jane, don't order me to stay at home, because, then, of course, I should feel bound to obey you, and I should not behave prettily, and you would wish me at the bottom of the sea, instead of on its brink. Let me go, and I will come back cool as a cucumber, and well-behaved as Miss Muriel Manton. Please don't prohibit me; and I promise I will lose my evil spirit in the sea, like that Gergesene wretch that haunted the tombs. Here comes Stanley. Don't shake your head. I am off."

Digitized by Google

Miss Jane would not receive the proffered farewell kiss, but tears gathered and dimmed her eyes as she looked after the graceful, girlish figure, swiftly crossing the lawn; and sad forebodings filled her affectionate heart when she thought of the unknown future that stretched before that impetuous, jealous, imperious nature.

Anxious that the strangers should feel thoroughly welcome and at home, she joined them as soon as possible after their return from the sheepfold, and exerted herself to keep the shuttlecock of conversation in constant motion; but her brother's watchful eyes discerned the perturbed feeling she sought to hide; and, when she insisted, for the first time in two years, upon taking her seat and presiding at the tea-table, he busied himself in arranging her cushions comfortably, and whispered, —

"How good and considerate you are, my precious sister. A thousand thanks for this generous effort, which I trust will not fatigue you."

He placed himself opposite, and was about to ask a blessing on the meal, but paused to inquire, —

"Where are the children, Salome and Stanley?"

"They have gone down to the beach, and we will not wait for them."

Soon after, Muriel said, —

"I think Salome is almost beautiful. She has splendid eyes and hair. Miss Edith, does she not remind you of a piece of sculpture at Naples?"

"Yes; I noticed a resemblance to the *Julia-Agrippina*, and the likeness must be remarkable, since it impressed us simultaneously. Salome's brow is fuller, and her chin more prominent than that of the Roman woman we admired so ardently; and, besides, I should judge that she had quite as much or more will than the daughter of Germanicus, for her lips are thinner."

Dr. Grey changed the topic of conversation, and Miss Dexter courteously followed the cue.

The moon was high in heaven when Salome and her brother came up the avenue; and, observing that the lights were extin-

Digitized by Google

guished in the front rooms, she surmised that the new-comers had retired very early, in consequence of fatigue from their long journey. Sending Stanley to bed, she sat down on the steps to rest a few moments before going upstairs, and began to fan herself with her straw hat.

She had grown very calm, and almost ashamed of her passionate ebullition in the presence of strangers; and numerous good resolutions were sending out fibrous roots in her heart. How long she rested there she knew not, and started when she Dr. Grey said, in a subdued voice,—

"Salome, I am waiting to lock the door, and should be glad if you will come in now, or be careful to secure the inner bolt whenever you do. As I always shut up the house, I was afraid you might not think of it; and burglaries are becoming alarmingly frequent."

She rose instantly, and entered the hall.

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Is it possible? You know, sir, that the evenings are very short now."

"Yes."

He was removing a chair from the gallery and closing the Venetian blinds, and she could not see his face. Hoping to receive some friendly look, which she was painfully aware she did not deserve, she loitered till he turned around.

"Salome, have you a light in your room?"

"I do not know, but suppose so."

"There are two candles in the library, and you had better take one, rather than stumble along in the dark and wake everybody."

He brought out one, and handed it to her.

"Thank you. Good-night, Dr. Grey."

"Good-night, Salome."

The candle-light showed no displeasure in his countenance, which was calm as usual, and there was not a hint of harshness in his unwontedly low voice; but she read disappointment in his grave, kind eyes. She knew that she could not sleep until

Digitized by Google

she had made her peace with him; and, though it cost her a great effort to conquer her pride, she said, humbly,—

"'And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent,—thou shalt forgive him.'"

"Yes; but the frequency of the offence renders it difficult to believe the repentance genuine."

"Christ, your master, did not doubt it."

"I am less than the disciples whom he addressed; and they answered, 'Increase our faith.'"

"You did not pray for me this morning."

"I never neglect my promises. Why do you doubt that I fulfilled them this morning?"

"This has been one of my sinful days, when Satan runs rough-shod over all my good intentions, and drags me through the mire that I was trying to hold my soul far above. I tell you, sir, that the 'unclean spirit' that vexed the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman was mild, and harmless, and well-mannered, in comparison with the demon that takes bodily possession of me, and whose name is not '*Suset*'! but a fearful *Ruach* demanding the ban *Cherem*. I once thought all that part of Scripture which referred to the casting out of devils was metaphorical; but I know better now; for the one that Luther assaulted with his inkstand was not more palpable than that which enters into my heart every now and then, and overturns the altars of the 'true, good, and beautiful,' and sets up instead a small hall of Eblis, as full of horrible, mis-shapen things as that hideous 'Last Judgment' of Orcagna, in the Campo Santo at Pisa, which you once showed me in a portfolio of engravings. Oh, Dr. Grey! you ought to be merciful to me; for indeed God gave me a fearfully wicked and cunning spirit for a perpetual companion and tempter. Even Christ had Lucifer and Quarantina."

"Yes, and conquered both, and promised assistance to all who earnestly desire and resolve to follow his example."

"You cannot forgive my rudeness?"

"The act of incivility was very slight; but, my young friend,

Digitized by Google

the unaccountable perversity of your character certainly fills my mind with serious apprehension concerning your future. Of course, I can very readily forgive the occasion that displayed it, but I cannot entirely forget the spirit that distresses me when I least expect it."

"If you will dismiss this afternoon from your mind, I will never--"

"Stop! Make me no more promises till you are strong enough to keep them inviolate. Promise less and pray more; I am not angry, but I am disappointed."

She drooped her head to avoid his grave, sad gaze, and for a moment there was silence.

"Dr. Grey, will you shake hands with me, in token of pardon?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

He took her hand in both of his, pressed it kindly, and said, in a low, solemn tone,—

"Good-night, Salome. May God guide, and strengthen, and help you to be the noble woman, the consistent Christian, which only His grace and blessing can ever enable you to become. Remember the cheering words of Jean Paul Richter, 'Evil is like the nightmare, the instant you bestir yourself it has already ended.'"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

"ELPIAN, have you had any conversation with Salome?"

"Upon what subject?"

"Have you talked with her concerning her studies?"

"Not recently. Soon after Muriel and Miss Dexter came, I mentioned to her the fact that I should be glad to see her enter a class with Muriel and pursue the same studies, and that such an arrangement would be entirely agreeable to Miss Dexter; but she declined the proposition, saying she would only trouble the latter to teach her Italian. Do you know why she is so anxious to acquire that language?"

"No; to tell you the truth, I know less and less every day about her actions, for the child has suddenly grown very reserved. This morning she was walking up and down the library with her hands behind her and her eyes looking as if they were travelling to Jericho or Jeddo, and when I asked her why she was so unusually silent, she snapped like a toy-torpedo, 'I am silent because this is one of my wicked days, and I am fighting the devil; and if I open my lips I shall say something that will give him the victory.' I held out my hand to her and begged her to come and sit by me and tell me what troubled or tempted her, — and what do you suppose she said?"

"Something, I am afraid, that I shall be sorry to hear you repeat."

"She laid her hand on her heart and answered, 'You are very good, Miss Jane, but you can no more help me than the disciples could relieve that wretch whom only Christ healed. '*This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*' Whereupon, she snatched a book from the table and left the room. I did not see her for several hours, and when I met her in the hall, a few moments since, I said, 'Well, dear, which won the victory, sin or my little girl?' She put her hands on my shoulders, laughed bitterly, and answered, 'It was a drawn battle.

Digitized by Google

Neither has much to boast of, and we lie on our arms watching — nay, glaring at each other. Let me be quiet a little while, and don't ask me about it.'"

"Can you conjecture the cause of the present trouble?"

"I have a suspicion."

Miss Jane paused, sighed, and frowned.

"I should think you might persuade her to confide in you."

'Pooh! Persuade her? I would quite as soon undertake to persuade the Andes to dance a jig as attempt to discover what she has determined not to divulge. If you knew her as well as I do, you would appreciate the uselessness of trying to persuade her to do anything. But you men never see what lies right under your noses, and I believe if you lived in the same house with that child for five years longer you would understand her as little as you do to-day. Ulpian, shut the door, and sit down here close to me."

Dr. Grey complied; and, laying her shrunken hand on her brother's knee, Miss Jane said, hesitatingly, —

"My dear boy, I don't know whether I ought to tell you, and, indeed, I do not see my way clearly; but you seem so unsuspecting that I think it is my duty to talk to you."

"Pray come to the point, dear Janet. Your exordium is very tantalizing. Tell me frankly what disturbs you."

"It pains me to call your attention to a fact that I know cannot fail to produce annoyance."

He put his arm around her, and, drawing her head to his shoulder, answered, tenderly, —

"My precious sister, I have seen for some days that you were perplexed and anxious, but I abstained from questioning you because I felt assured whenever you deemed it best to confide in me, you would voluntarily unburden your heart. Now lay all your troubles upon me, and keep back nothing. Has Salome grieved you?"

"Oh, the child does not intend to grieve me! Ulpian, can't you imagine what makes her unhappy, and restless, and contrary?"

"She is very wayward, passionate, and obstinate, and any

Digitized by Google

restraint upon her whims is peculiarly irksome and intolerable to her; but I believe she is really striving to correct the unfortunate defects in her character. She evidently dislikes our guests, and this proves a continual source of disquiet to her; for, while she endeavors to treat them courteously, I can see that she would be excessively rude if she dared to indulge her antipathies."

"Do you know why she dislikes Muriel so intensely?"

"No; I cannot even conjecture. Muriel is very amiable and affectionate, and seems disposed to become very fond of Salome, if she would only encourage her advances. Can you explain the mystery?"

"If you were not as blind as a mole, or the fish in Mammoth Cave, you would see that Salome is insanely jealous of your affection for your ward, and that is the cause of all the trouble."

"It is unreasonable and absurd in her to entertain such feelings; and, moreover, she has no right to cherish any jealousy towards my ward."

"Unreasonable! Yes, quite true; but did you ever know a woman to be very reasonable concerning the man she loves?"

Dr. Grey's quiet face flushed, and he rose instantly, looking incredulous and embarrassed.

"Surely, my dear sister, you do not intend to insinuate, or desire me to infer, that Salome has any—"

He paused, bit his lip, and walked to the window.

"I mean to say, in plain Anglo-Saxon, and I desire you to understand, that Salome is no longer a child; and that she loves you, my dear boy, better than she will ever love any other human being. These things are very strange, indeed, and girls' whims baffle all rules and disappoint all reasonable expectations; but, nevertheless, it does no good to shut your eyes to facts that are as clear as daylight. It is not a sudden freak that has seized the poor child; it has grown upon her, almost without her understanding herself; but I discovered it the day that you left home so unexpectedly for New York. Her distress betrayed

Digitized by Google

her real feelings; and, since then, I have watched her, and I can see how completely her thoughts centre in you."

"Oh, Janet, I hope you mistake her! I cannot believe it possible, for I recall nothing in her conduct that justifies your supposition; and I do not think I lack penetration. If she were really interested in me, as you imagine, she certainly would not thrust so prominently and constantly before me faults of character which she well knows I cannot tolerate. Moreover, my dear sister, consider the disparity in our years, the incompatibility of our tastes and habits, and the improbability that a handsome young girl should cherish any feeling stronger than esteem or friendship for a staid man of my age! No, no; it is too incredible to be entertained, and I am sorry you ever suggested such an annoying chimera to me. Salome is rather a singular compound, I willingly admit, but I acquit her of the folly you seem inclined to impute to her."

Dr. Grey walked up and down the library floor, and, as his sister watched him, a sad smile trembled over her thin, wrinkled face.

"Ulpian, you are considerably younger than our poor father was when he married a beautiful creature not one month older than Salome is to-day. Will you sit in judgment on your own young mother?"

"Nay, Janet; the parallelism is not as apparent as you imagine, for my manner toward Salome has been calculated to check and chill any sentiment analogous to that which my father sought to win from my mother. Pray, do not press upon me a surmise which is indescribably painful to me."

He resumed his seat, and, thrusting his fingers through his hair, leaned his head on his open hand.

"My dear boy, if true, why should it prove indescribably painful to you?"

"Cannot your womanly intuitions spare me an explicit reply?"

"No; speak frankly to me."

"No man of honor — no man who has any delicacy or refinement of feeling — can fail to be distressed and annoyed by the

Digitized by Google

thought that he has unintentionally and unconsciously aroused in a woman's heart an interest which he cannot possibly reciprocate."

"But, if you have never considered the subject until now, how do you know that you may not be able to return the affection?"

"Because, when I examine my own heart, I find not even the germ of a feeling which years might possibly ripen into love."

"Will you candidly answer the question I am about to ask you?"

"Yes, I think I can safely promise that much, simply because I wish to conceal nothing from you; and I cannot conjecture any inquiry on your part from which I should shrink. What would you ask?"

"Is it because you are interested in some other woman, that you speak so positively of the hopelessness of my poor Salome's case?"

"No, my sister; no woman has any claim or hold on my heart stronger than that of mere friendship. I have never loved any one as I must love the woman I make my wife; and since I have seen and merely admired so many who were attractive, lovely, and lovable, I often think that I shall probably never marry.

> . . . . . 'For several virtues
> I have liked several women; never any
> With so full a soul, but some defect in her
> Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owned,
> And put it to a foil.'

Of course this is a matter with reference to which I shall not dogmatize, for we are all more or less the victims of caprice; and, like other men, I may some day set the imperious feet of fancy upon the neck of judgment and sound reason. As yet, I have not met the perfect character whom I could ask to bear my name; still, I may be so fortunate as either to find my ideal, or imagine that I do; or else become so earnestly attached to some beautiful woman, that, for her sake, I will willingly lower my

Digitized by Google

lofty standard. These are the merest possible contingencies, and I have little inclination to discuss them; but I wish at all times to be entirely frank with you. Salome would never suit me as a life-long companion. She meets none of the requirements of my intellectual nature, and her perverse disposition, and what might almost be termed *diablerie*, repel instead of attracting me. I pity the child, and can sympathize cordially with her efforts to redeem herself from the luckless associations of earlier years that wofully distorted her character; and I can truly say that I am interested in her welfare and improvement, and have a faint brotherly affection for her; but I thoroughly comprehend my own feelings when I assure you, Janet, that were Salome and I left alone in the world I could never for a moment entertain the idea of calling such a wayward child my wife. Are you satisfied?"

"Convinced, at least, that you are not deceiving me. But, Ulpian, the girl is growing very beautiful — don't you think so? — or, is it my love that makes me see her through flattering lenses?"

"Her lips are too thin, and her eyes too keen and restless for perfect beauty, which claims repose as one of its essential elements; but, notwithstanding these flaws, she has undoubtedly one of the handsomest faces I have ever seen, and certainly a graceful, fine figure."

"And you are such an admirer of beauty," said Miss Jane, slipping her fingers caressingly into her brother's hand.

"Yes; I shall not deny that I yield to no one in appreciation of lovely faces; but, if I am aware that, like some rich crimson June rose whose calyx cradles a worm, the heart beneath the perfect form is gnawed by some evil tendency, or shelters vindictive passion and sinful impulses, I should certainly not select it in making up the precious bouquet that is to shed perfume and beauty in my home, and call my thoughts from the din and strife of the outer world to holiness and peace."

"You have no mercy on the child."

"I ought to have no mercy on glaring faults which she should ere this have corrected."

Digitized by Google

"But she is so young — only seventeen! Think of it!"

Dr. Grey frowned, and partially withdrew his hand from his sister's clasp.

"Janet, you grieve me. Surely you are not pleading with me in behalf of Salome?"

Tears trickled over Miss Jane's sallow cheeks and dripped on the doctor's hand, as she replied, —

"Bear with me, Ulpian. The girl is very dear to me; and, loving you as she unquestionably does, I know that you could make her a noble, admirable woman, — for she has some fine traits, and your influence would perfect her character. Believe me, my dear boy, you, and you only, can remould her heart."

"Possibly, — if I loved her; for then I would be patient and forbearing towards her faults. But I cannot even respect that handsome, fiery, impulsive, unreasonable child, much less love her; and, if I ever marry, my wife must be worthy to remould my own defective life and erring nature. I am surprised, my dear sister, that you, whose sincere affection I can not doubt, should be willing to see me link my life with that of one so much younger, and, I grieve to say it, so far inferior in all respects. What congenial companionship could I promise myself? What confidence could I repose — what esteem could I entertain — for a silly girl, who, without warrant and utterly unsought, bestows her love (if, indeed, what you say be true) upon a man who never even dreamed of such folly, and is old enough to be her father?"

"I can not comprehend the logic that condemns Salome, and justifies your own mother; for, if there be any difference in their lines of conduct, I am too stupid to see it."

Miss Jane lifted her head from her brother's shoulder, resolutely dried her eyes, and settled her cap.

"My mother's tombstone should shelter her from all animadversion, especially from the lips that owe their existence to her. Do not, my sister, disturb the mouldering ashes of the long-buried past. The unfortunate fact you have mentioned, and which I should gladly doubt if you would only permit me to do so, renders it necessary for me to be perfectly candid with you,

Digitized by Google

and you will, I trust, pardon what I feel compelled to say to you I have remarked that you watch me quite closely whenever I am engaged in conversation with my ward or her governess; and yesterday, when Muriel came, stood by me, and leaned her arm on my shoulder, you frowned and looked harshly at the child. Once for all, let me tell you that there is no more possibility of my loving Muriel or Edith, than Salome. Of the three, I care most for Muriel, who looks upon me as her second father, and to whom I am deeply attached. If I caress the poor, stricken child, and allow her to approach me familiarly, you ought to understand your brother sufficiently well not to ascribe his conduct to any feeling which he would blush to confess to his sister. The day before Horace died, he said, 'Be a father to my daughter; take my place when I am gone.' If I were at liberty to divulge some matters confided to me, I could easily assure you that there is not a shadow of possibility that Muriel will ever grieve and mortify me as Salome has done. Now look at me, dear Janet, and kiss me, and trust your brother; for he will never deceive you, and can not endure a moment's estrangement from you."

Miss Jane put up her lips for the caress, and, after a short silence, Dr. Grey continued,—

"Tell me now what you think best under the circumstances, and I will endeavor to coöperate with you. Does Salome know you are cognizant of her weakness — her misfortune — "

He stammered, and again his face flushed.

"Upon my word, Ulpian, you are positively blushing! Don't worry yourself, dear, over what can not be helped, or at least is attributable to no fault of yours. No; you may be sure Salome would be drawn, quartered, and broiled, before she would confess to me the feeling which she does not suspect I have discovered. Poor thing! I can't avoid pitying her whenever you take Muriel's hand or caress her in any way. This morning you smoothed the hair back from her forehead while she was stooping over her drawing, and poor Salome's eyes flashed and looked like a leopard's. She clenched her fingers as if she were strangling something, and an expression came over her face that was dan-

Digitized by Google

gerous, and made me shiver a little. Something must be done; but I am sure I do not know what to advise."

"How futile and mocking are merely human schemes! My principal object in bringing Muriel and Miss Dexter here, was to provide agreeable and improving companions for your pet and to afford her the privilege of sharing the educational advantages which Muriel enjoyed. *L'homme propose, et Dieu dispose,* if, indeed, an occurrence so earnestly to be deplored can be deemed providential. What are her plans relative to Jessie?"

"If she has matured any, she keeps them shut up in her own heart. Once she talked freely to me on all subjects, but recently she seems to avoid acquainting me with her intentions or schemes. Of course, Ulpian, you know I have always expected to leave her a portion of my property."

"Certainly, dear Janet; you ought to provide comfortably for the girl whom you have taught to rely upon your bounty. It would be cruel and unpardonable to foster hopes that you could not fully realize."

"It was my intention to put into your hands the share I intended for her, and to leave her also to your care, when I die; but now I know not what is best. If she could be separated from you, she might divert her thoughts and become interested in other things or persons; but so long as you are in the same house I know there will be nothing but wretchedness and disappointment for her."

After a long pause, during which Dr. Grey looked seriously pained and perplexed, he said, sorrowfully,—

"You are right in thinking separation would be best; and I will go away at once—"

"Go where?" exclaimed his sister, grasping his coat-sleeve.

"I will furnish the rooms over my office, and live there. It will be more convenient for my business; but I dislike to leave you and the dear old homestead."

"Stuff! You will churn the Atlantic, with the North Pole for a dasher! Ulpian Grey! come weal come woe, I don't intend to give you up. Here, right here, you will live while there is breath in my body,—unless you wish to make me sob

Digitized by Google

it out and die the sooner. Pooh! Salome's shining eyes can not recompense me for the loss of my boy's blue ones, and I will not hear of such nonsense as the move you propose. You know, dear, I can't be here very long at the best, and while God spares me I want you near me. Besides, the separation of a few miles would not be worth a thimbleful of chaff; for, of course, Salome would hear of or see you daily, and the change would amount to nothing but anxiety and grief on my part. We will think the matter over, and do nothing rashly. But try to be patient with my little girl; and, for my sake, Ulpian, do not allow her to suspect that you dream of her feeling towards you. It is pitiable,—it is distressing beyond expression; and God knows, if I had thought for an instant that such a state of things would ever have come to pass, I would have left her in the poor-house sooner than have been instrumental in bringing such misery upon her young life. Last night I was suffering so much with my shoulder that I could not sleep, and I heard the child pacing her room until after three o'clock. It was useless to question her; for, of course, she would not confess the real cause, and I did not wish her to know that I noticed what I could not cure. But, my dearest boy, we are not to be blamed; so don't look so mortified and grieved. I would not have opened your unsuspecting eyes if I had not feared that your ignorance of the truth might increase the trouble, and I knew I could safely appeal to my sailor-boy's honor. Now you know all, and must be guided by your own good sense and delicacy in your future course toward the poor, proud young thing. Be guarded, Ulpian, and don't torment her by petting Muriel in her presence; for sometimes I am afraid there is bad blood in her veins, that brings that wicked glow to her eyes, and I dread that she might suddenly say or do some desperate thing that would plunge us all in sorrow. You know she is not a meek creature, and we must pity her weakness."

Dr. Grey had grown very pale, and the profound regret printed on his countenance found expression also in the deepened and saddened tones of his voice.

"Trust me, Janet! I will do all a man can to rectify the

Digitized by Google

mischief, of which, God knows, I have been an innocent and entirely unintentional cause. Salome's course is unwomanly, and lowers her in my estimation; but she is so young I shall hope and pray that her preference for me is not sufficiently strong to prove more than an idle, fleeting, girlish fancy."

He took his gloves from the table and left the room; and, for some time after his departure, his sister sat rocking herself to and fro, pondering all that had passed. Finally, she struck her hand decisively upon the cushioned top of her crutch, and muttered, —

"Yes, he certainly is as nearly perfect as humanity can be; but, after all, Ulpian Grey is only flesh and blood, and despite his efforts to crush it, there must be some vanity hidden under his proud humility, — for certainly he is both humble in one sense, and inordinately proud in another; and I do not believe there lives a man of his age who would not be flattered by the love of a fresh young beauty like Salome. He thinks now that he is distressed and mortified; and, of course, he is honest in what he tells me; but I have studied human nature to very little purpose for the last fifty years, if, before long, he does not find himself more interested in Salome than he will be willing to confess. Her love for him will invest her with a charm she never possessed before, for men are vulnerable as women to the cunning advances of flattery. One thing is as sure and clear as that two and two make four, — if he is proof against Salome's devotion it will be attributable to the fact that he gives his heart to some one else; and I thought his blue eyes rather shied away from mine when he said he had yet to meet the woman he could marry. You don't intend to deceive me, my precious boy, I know you don't; but I should not be astounded if you had hoodwinked yourself, — a very little. But 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and I will wait, — and we shall see what we shall see."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV.

"ELSIE, it is worse than useless to talk to me. Once I could listen to you, — once I felt as you do now; but that time has gone by forever. I will read to you as often as you desire it, provided you do not make every chapter a text for a sermon. What do you wish to hear this morning?"

"The fortieth Psalm."

Mrs. Gerome opened the bible, and, when she had finished the Psalm designated, shut the book and laid it back close to Elsie's pillow.

The old woman placed her hand on the round, white arm of her mistress, who rested carelessly against the bed.

"You know, my child, that David's afflictions were sore indeed; but he declares, 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.' You will not be patient, and God can't help you till you are. We are like children punished for bad conduct, — as long as we rebel and struggle, of course we must be still further chastised; but the moment we show real penitence, our parents notice that we are bearing correction patiently, and then they throw away the rod and stretch out their arms, and snatch us close to their loving hearts. Even so God holds one hand to draw us tenderly to Him; and, if we are obstinately sinful, with the other He scourges us into the right path, — determined to help us, even against our own wills. Ah, if I could see you waiting patiently for the Lord!"

"You will never see it. Patience was 'scourged' out of me, and now I stand still because I am worn out with struggling, waiting — not patiently, but wearily and helplessly — to see the end of my punishment. What have I done that I should feign a penitence I shall never feel? I was a happy, trusting, unoffending woman, when God smote me fiercely; and, because I was so innocent, I could not kiss my stinging rod, I grappled

Digitized by Google

desperately with it. Elsie, don't stir up the bitter dregs in my soul, and mix them with every thought. Let them settle."

"My darling, I don't want them to settle. I pray either that they may be stirred up and taken out, or sweetened by the grace of God. Do you ever think of the day when you will face your sainted mother?"

"No. I think only of enduring this present life until death, my deliverer, comes to my rescue."

"But, my bairn, you are not fit to die."

"Fit to die as to live," answered her mistress, morosely.

"For God's sake, don't flout the Almighty in that wicked manner! If you would only be baptized and take refuge in prayer, as every Christian should, you would find peace for your poor, miserable soul."

"No; peace can't be poured out of a pitcher with the baptismal water; and all the waves tossing and glittering out there in the ocean could not wash one painful memory from my heart. I have had one baptism, and it was ample and thorough. I went down into the waters of woe, and all their black billows broke over me. Instead of the Jordan, I was immersed in the Dead Sea, and the asphaltum cleaves to me."

"Oh, dearie, you will break my heart! I wish now that you had died when you were only fourteen months old, for then there would have been one more precious lamb in the flock of the Good Shepherd, safe in heavenly pastures — one more dear little golden head nestling on Jesus' bosom, — instead of — of —"

Elsie's emotion mastered her voice, and she sobbed convulsively.

"Why did not you finish? 'Instead of a gray head waiting to go down into the pit of perdition.' Yes, it was a terrible blunder that I was not allowed to die in my infancy; but it can't be helped now, and I wish you would not fret yourself into a fever over the irremediable. Why will you persist in tormenting yourself and me about my want of resignation and faith, when you know that exhortation and persuasion have no more effect upon me than the whistle of the plover down yonder

Digitized by Google

in the sedge and sea-weed, — where I heartily wish I were lying, ten feet under the shells? Rather a damp pillow for my fastidious, proud head, but, at least, cool and quiet. Calm yourself, my dear Elsie, for God will not hold you responsible if I miss my place among the saints, when He divides the sheep from the goats, in the last day, — *Dies iræ, dies illa.* Let me straighten your pillow and smooth your cap-border, for I see your doctor coming up the walk. There, — dry your eyes. When you want me, send Robert or Katie to call me."

Mrs. Gerome leaned over the helpless, prostrate form on the bed, pressed her cheek against that of her nurse, where tears still glistened, and glided swiftly out of the room just before Dr. Grey entered.

Never had he seen his patient so completely unnerved; but, observing her efforts to compose herself, he forbore any allusion to an agitation which he suspected was referable to mental rather than physical causes. Bravely the stubborn woman struggled to steady her voice, and still the twitching tell-tale muscles about her mouth; but the burden of anxiety finally bore down all resolves, and, covering her face with her broad hand, she wept unrestrainedly.

In profound silence Dr. Grey sat beside her for nearly five minutes; then, fearful that the excitement might prove injurious, he said, gently, —

"I hope you are not suffering so severely from bodily pain? What distresses you, my good woman? Perhaps, if I knew the cause, I might be able to render you some service."

"It is not my body, — that, you know, is numb, and gives me no pain, — but my mind! Doctor, I am suffering in mind, and you have no medicine that can ease that."

"Possibly I may accomplish more than you imagine is within reach of my remedies. Of one thing you may rest assured, — you will never have reason to regret any confidence you may repose in me."

"Dr. Grey, I believe you are a Christian; at least, I have heard so; and, since my affliction, I have been watching you

Digitized by Google

very closely, and begin to think I can trust you. Are you a member of the church?"

"I am; although that fact alone should not entitle me to your confidence. We are all erring, and full of faults, but I endeavor to live in such a manner that I shall not bring disgrace upon the holy faith I profess."

"Shut the door, and come back to me."

He bolted the door, which stood ajar, and resumed his seat.

"Dr. Grey, I know as well as you do that I can't last a great while, and I ought to prepare for what may overtake me any day. I have tried to live in accordance with the law of God, and I am not afraid to die; but I am afraid to leave my mistress behind me. When I am gone there will be no one to watch over and plead with her, and I dread lest her precious soul may be lost. She won't go to God for herself, or by herself, and who will pray for her salvation when I am in my shroud? Oh, I can not die in peace, leaving her alone in the world she hates and despises! What will become of my poor, bonnie bairn?"

Elsie sobbed aloud, and Dr. Grey asked,—

"Has Mrs. Gerome no living relatives?"

"None, sir, in America. There are some cousins in Scotland, but she has never seen them, and never will."

"Where are the members of her husband's family?"

A visible shudder crept over that portion of the woman's body which was not paralyzed, and her face grew dark and stern.

"He was an orphan."

"His loss seems to have had a terrible effect upon Mrs. Gerome, and rendered her bitter and hopeless."

"How hopeless, none but she and I and the God above us know. Once she was the meekest, sweetest spirit, that ever gladdened a nurse's heart, and I thought the world was blessed by her coming into it; but now she is sacrilegious and scoffing, and almost dares the Lord's judgments. Dr. Grey, it would nearly freeze your blood to hear her sometimes. Poor thing! she will have no companions, and so has a habit of talking to herself, and I often hear her arguing with the Almighty about

Digitized by Google

her life, and the trouble He allowed to fall into it. Last night she was walking there under my window, begging God to take her out of the world before I die. Begging, did I say? Nay,—demanding. My precious, pretty bairn!"

"Elsie, be candid with me. Is not Mrs. Gerome partially deranged?"

She struggled violently to raise herself, but failing, her head fell back, and she lifted her finger angrily.

"No more deranged than you or I. That is a vile slander of busybodies whom she will not receive, and who take it for granted that no lady in her sound senses would refuse the privilege of gossiping with them. She is as sane as any one, though there is an unnatural appearance about her, and if her heart was only as sound as her head I could die easily. They started the report of craziness long, long ago, in order to get hold of her fortune; but it was too infamous a scheme to succeed."

Elsie's strong white teeth were firmly set, and her clenched fingers did not relax.

"Who started the report of her insanity?"

"One who injured her, and made her what you see her."

"She had no children?"

"Oh, no! Once I begged her to adopt a pretty little orphan girl we saw in Athens, but she ridiculed me for an old fool, and asked me if I wished to see her warm a viper to sting what was left of her heart."

"Mrs. Gerome has indulged her grief for her husband's loss, until she has become morbidly sensitive. She should go into the world, and interest herself in benevolent schemes; and, ultimately, her diseased thoughts would flow into new and healthful channels. The secluded life she leads is a hot-bed for the growth of noxious fungi in heart and mind. If you possess any influence over her, persuade her to re-enter society. She is still young enough to find not only a cure for her grief, but an ample share of even earthly happiness."

Elsie sighed, and waved her hand impatiently.

"You do not know all, or you would understand that in this

Digitized by Google

world she can not expect much happiness. Besides, she is peculiarly sensitive about her appearance; and, of course, when she is seen, people stare, and wonder how such a young thing got that pile of white hair. That is the reason she quit travelling and shut herself up here."

"Was it grief that prematurely silvered her hair?"

"Yes, sir; it was as black as your coat, until her trouble came; and then in a fortnight it turned as gray as you see it now. Doctor, I said she was not deranged, and I spoke truly; but sometimes I have feared that, when I am gone, she might get desperate, and, in her loneliness, destroy herself. You are a sensible man, and can hold your tongue, and I feel that I can trust you. Now, I know that Robert loves her, and while he lives will serve her faithfully; but you are wiser than my son, and I should be better satisfied if I left her in your charge, when I go home. Will you promise me to take care of her, and to try to comfort her in the day when she sees me buried?"

"Elsie, you impose upon me a duty which I am afraid Mrs. Gerome will not allow me to discharge; and, since she is so exceedingly averse to meeting strangers, I should not feel justified in thrusting myself into her presence."

"Not even to prevent a crime?"

"I hope that your excited imagination and anxious heart exaggerate the possibility of the danger to which you allude."

"No; exaggeration is not one of my habits, and I know my mistress better than she knows herself. She thinks that suicide is not a sin, but says it is cowardly; and she utterly detests and loathes cowardice. Dr. Grey, I could not rest quietly in my coffin if she is left alone in this dreary house, after I am carried to my long home. Will you stay here awhile, or take her to your house, — at least for a short time?"

"I will, at all events, promise to comply with your wishes as fully as she will permit. But recollect that I am comparatively a stranger to her, and her haughty reception of me the day I was compelled to come here on your account, does not encourage me to presume in future. Respect for her wishes, however unrea-

Digitized by Google

sonable, and respect for myself, would forbid an intrusion on my part."

"If you saw an utter stranger drowning, would fear of being considered presumptuous or impertinent prevent your trying to save him? Your self-love should not hold you back from a Christian duty."

"And you may rest assured that it never shall, when I feel that interference — no matter how unwelcome or ungraciously received — will prove beneficial. But remember that your mistress is eccentric and shrinking, and all efforts to befriend her must be made very cautiously."

"True, doctor; yet sometimes, instead of consulting her, it is best to treat her as a wilful child. I believe you could obtain some influence over her if you would only try to break the ice, because she has spoken kindly of you several times since I have been so helpless, and asked what she could do to show her gratitude for your goodness to me. Yesterday she said she intended to direct Robert to take some fine fruit to your house; and she remarked that your eyes were, in comparison with other folks', what Sabbath is to working week-days, — were so full of rest, that tired anxious people might be refreshed by looking at them. Sir, that is more than I have heard her utter for seven years about anybody; and, therefore, I think you might do her some good."

Dr. Grey shook his head, but remained silent; and presently Elsie touched his arm, and continued, —

"There is something I wish to say to you before I die, but not now. I want you to promise me that when you see my end is indeed at hand, you will tell me in time to let me talk a little to you. Will you?"

"You may linger for months, and it is possible that you may die quite suddenly; consequently, it might be impracticable for me to fulfil the promise you require. Still, if I can do so, I will certainly comply with your wishes. Would it not be better to tell me at once what you desire me to know?"

"While I live it is not necessary that any one should know, and it is only when I am about to die that I shall speak to you.

Digitized by Google

For my sake, for humanity's sake, try to become acquainted with my mistress and make her like you, as she certainly will, if she only knows you."

A tap at the door interrupted the conversation, and soon after, Dr. Grey quitted the sick-room.

He paused in the hall to examine a fine copy of Landseer's "Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner," and, while he stood before it, a large greyhound started up from the mat at the front door, and bounded towards him. Simultaneously Mrs. Gerome appeared at the threshold of the parlor.

"Come here, sir! Poor fellow, come here!"

The dog obeyed her instantly; and, pressing close to her, looked up wistfully in her face.

"Good morning, Mrs. Gerome. I must thank you for coming so promptly to my assistance. I have never seen this dog until to-day, and, consequently, was not on my guard."

"He arrived only yesterday, and is so overjoyed to be with me once more that he allows no one else to approach."

"He is by far the handsomest dog I have ever seen in America."

"Yes, I had great difficulty in obtaining him. My agent assures me that he belongs to the best that are reared in the tribe of Beni Lam; and that he is a genuine Arab, there can be no doubt."

"How long have you owned him?"

"Two years. Unfortunately he was bitten by a snake one day while wandering with me among the ruins at Pæstum, and was so singularly affected that I was forced to leave him at Naples. Various causes combined to delay his restoration to me until last week, when he crossed the Atlantic; and yesterday he went into ecstasies when I received him from the express agent. Hush! no growling! Down, sir! Take care, Dr. Grey; he will bear no hand but mine, and it is rather dangerous to caress him, as you may judge from the fangs he is showing you."

The dog was remarkably tall, silky, beautifully formed, and of a soft mole-color; and around his neck a collar formed of

Digitized by Google

four small silver chains, bore an oval silver plate on which was engraved in German text, "*Ich Dien — Agla Gerome.*"

"I congratulate you upon the possession of such a treasure," said the visitor, with unfeigned admiration, — as, with the eye of a *connoisseur*, he noted the fine points about the sleek, slim animal, who eyed him suspiciously.

"Thank you. How is Elsie to-day?"

"More nervous than I have seen her since the accident, and some of her symptoms are rather discouraging, though there is no immediate danger. Do not look so hopeless; she may be spared to you for many months."

"Why will you not let me hope that she may ultimately recover?"

"Because it is utterly futile, and I have no desire to deceive you, even for an instant. Good morning, Robert."

The gardener approached with a large basket filled with peaches and nectarines, and, taking off his hat, bowed profoundly.

"My mistress ordered these placed in your buggy, as I believe our nectarines ripen earlier than any others in the neighborhood."

"Thank you, Maclean. Mrs. Gerome is exceedingly kind, and I have an invalid sister who will enjoy this beautiful fruit. Those nectarines would not disgrace Smyrna or Damascus, and are the first of the season."

Robert passed through the hall, bearing the basket to the buggy; and at that instant there was a startling crash, as of some heavy article falling in the parlor. The dog sprang up with a howl, and Dr. Grey followed Mrs. Gerome into the room to ascertain the cause of the noise. A glance sufficed to explain that a picture in a heavy frame had fallen from a hook above the mantel-piece, and in its descent overturned some tall vases, which now lay shattered on the hearth. Dr. Grey lifted the painting from the rubbish, and, as he turned the canvas towards the light, Mrs. Gerome said, —

"'*Une tristesse implacable, une effroyable fatalité pèse sur l'œuvre de l'artiste. Cela ressemble à une malediction amère,*

Digitized by Google

lancée sur le sort de l'humanité.' There is, indeed, some fatality about that copy of Durer's 'Knight, Death, and the Devil,' which seems really ill-omened, for this is the second time it has fallen. Thank you, sir. The frame only is injured, and I will not trouble you to remove it. Let it lean against the grate, until I have it rehung more securely."

"It is too grim a picture for these walls, and stares at its companions like the mummy at Egyptian banquets."

"On the contrary, it impresses me as grotesque in comparison with Durer's 'Melancholy,' yonder, or with Holbein's 'Les Simulachres de la mort.'"

"Durer's figure of 'Melancholy' has never satisfied me, and there is more ferocity than sadness in the countenance, which would serve quite as well for one of the Erinnes hunting Orestes, even in the adytum at Delphi. The face is more sinister than sorrowful."

"Since your opinion of that picture coincides so entirely with mine, tell me whether I have successfully grasped Coleridge's dim ideal."

Mrs. Gerome drew from a corner of the rear room an easel containing a finished but unframed picture; and, gathering up the lace curtain drooping before the arch, she held the folds aside, to allow the light to fall full on the canvas.

"Before you examine it, recall the description that suggested it."

"I am sorry to say that my recollection of the passage is exceedingly vague and unsatisfactory. Will you oblige me by repeating it?"

"Excuse me; your hand is resting upon the book, which is open at the fragment."

Dr. Grey bowed, and, lifting the volume from the table, glanced rapidly over the lines designated, then turned to the picture, where, indeed,

> "Stretched on a mouldering abbey's broadest wall,
> Where ruining ivies propped the ruins steep,
> Her folded arms wrapping her tattered pall,
> Had Melancholy mused herself to sleep.

Digitized by Google

The fern was pressed beneath her hair,
The dark green adder's tongue was there;
And still as past the flagging sea-gale weak,
The long, lank leaf bowed fluttering o'er her cheek.
That pallid cheek was flushed; her eager look
Beamed eloquent in slumber! Inly wrought,
Imperfect sounds her moving lips forsook,
And her bent forehead worked with troubled thought."

The beautiful face of the reclining figure was dreamily hopeless and dejected, yet pathetically patient; and, in the strange amber light reflected from a sunset sea, the fringy shadow of a cluster of fern-leaves seemed to quiver over the pale brow and still mouth, and floating raven hair, where the green snake glided with crest erect and forked tongue within an inch of one delicate, pearly ear. The gray stones of the lichen-spotted wall, the graceful sweep of the shrouding drab drapery, whose folds clung to the form and thence swung down from the edge of the rocky battlement, the mouldering ruins leaning against the quiet sky in the rear, and the glassy stretch of topaz-tinted sea in the foreground, were all painted with pre-Raphaelite exactness and verisimilitude, and every detail attested the careful, tender study, with which the picture had been elaborated.

Was it by accident or design that the woman on the painted wall bore a vague, mournful resemblance to the owner and creator? Dr. Grey glanced from Durer's "Melancholy" to the canvas on the easel; then his fascinated eyes dwelt on the dainty features of the artist, and he thought involuntarily of another Coleridgean image, — of the "pilgrim in whom the spring and the autumn, and the melancholy of both, seemed to have combined."

"Mrs. Gerome, in this wonderful embodiment of Coleridge's fragmentary ideal you have painted your own portrait."

"No, sir. Look again. My 'Melancholia' has a patient face, hinting of possible peace. When I design its companion, 'Desolation,' I may be pardoned if my canvas reflects what always fronts it."

Digitized by Google

"May I ask when you wrought out this extraordinary conception?"

"During the past month. The last touch was given this morning, and the paint is not yet dry on that cluster of purplish seaweed clinging to the base of the battlement. Last night I dreamed that Coleridge stood looking over my shoulder, and while I worked he touched the sea, and it flushed a ruby red brighter than laudanum; and then he leaned down, and with a pencil wrote *Dele* across the fragment in his 'Sibylline Leaves.' To-day I tried the effect of the hint, but the amber water mellows the woman's features, and the ruby light rendered them sullen and rigid."

"Were I to judge from the *bizarre* themes that you select, I should be tempted to fear that the wizard spell of opium evoked some of these strangely beautiful creations of your brush. What suggested this picture?"

"You merely wish to complete your diagnosis of my psychological condition? If so, there is no reason why I should hesitate to tell you that while I was playing one of Chopin's *Nocturnes* the significance of the Polish '*Zäl*' perplexed me. In striving to analyze it, Coleridge's 'Melancholy' occurred to my mind, and teased and haunted me until I wrought it out palpably. My work there means more than his fragment, and includes something which I suppose Chopin meant by that insynonymous word '*Zäl*.'"

Standing under the arch, with one hand holding back the lace drapery, the other hanging nerveless at her side, she looked as weird as any of her ideal creations; and, in the greenish sea-shine breaking through the dense foliage of the trees about the house, her wan face, snowy muslin dress, and floating white ribbons, seemed unsubstantial as the figures on the wall. To-day there was no spot of color in face or dress, save the azure gleam of the large, brilliant ring, on her uplifted hand; and, as Dr Grey scrutinized her appearance, he found it difficult to realize that blood pulsed in that marble flesh, and warm breath fluttered in that firm, frigid mouth. Glancing around the rooms, he said,—

Digitized by Google

"Solitude is indeed a misnomer for a home peopled with such creations as adorn these walls."

"No. Have you forgotten the definition of Epictetus? '*To be friendless is solitude.*'"

"I hope, madam, that you may never find yourself in that unfortunate category, and certainly there are—"

"Sir, I know what Michael Angelo felt when he wrote from Rome, 'I have no friends; I need none.'"

She interrupted him with an indescribably haughty gesture, and an anomalous spasm of the lips that belonged to no known class of smiles.

"On the contrary, Mrs. Gerome, the hunger for true friends has rendered you morose and cynical."

He did not shrink from the wide eyes that flashed like blue steel in moonshine; and as his own, calm, steady, and magnetic, dwelt gravely on her face, he fancied she winced, slightly.

"No, sir. When I hunt or recognize friends, I shall borrow Diogenes' lantern. Good morning, Dr. Grey."

"Pardon me if I detain you for a moment to inquire who taught you to paint."

"The absolute necessity of self-forgetfulness."

"But you surely had some tuition in the art?"

"Yes; I had the usual boarding-school privilege of a master for perspective, and pastel. Dr. Grey, have you been to Europe?"

"Yes, madam; on several occasions."

"You visited Dresden?"

"I did."

"Step forward a little,—there. Now, sir, do you know that painting hanging over my *escritoire?*"

"It is Ruysdael's 'Churchyard,' and, from this distance, seems a remarkably fine copy of that sombre, desolate, ghoul-haunted picture."

"Thank you. That is the only piece of work of which I feel really proud. Some day, when the light is pure and strong, come in and examine it. Now there is a greenish tinge over all things in the room thrown by sea-shimmer through the

Digitized by Google

clustering leaves. Ah, what a long, low, presageful moan that was, which broke from foaming lips, on yonder strand!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Gerome. The inspection of your pictures has yielded me so much pleasure that I must tender you my very sincere thanks for your courtesy."

She bowed distantly; and, when he reached his buggy, he glanced back and saw that perfect, pallid face, pressed against the cedar facing of the oriel, looking seaward. He lifted his hat, but she did not observe the salute; and, as he drove away, she kept her eyes upon the murmuring waves, and repeated, as was her habit, the lines that chanced to present themselves,—

"Listen! you hear the solemn roar
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence, slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles, long ago,
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery."

CHAPTER XV.

"MISS DEXTER, where is Muriel?" asked Dr. Grey, glancing around the library, where the governess sat sewing, while Salome read aloud a passage in Ariosto.

"She is not very well, and went up stairs, two hours ago, to rest. Do you wish to see her immediately?"

"Yes. Call her down."

When the teacher left the room, Dr. Grey approached the table where Salome sat, and looked over her shoulder.

"I went to the Asylum to-day, and found little Jessie very well, but quite dissatisfied because you visit her so rarely.

Digitized by Google

You should see her as often as possible, since she is so dependent upon you for sympathy and affection."

"I do."

"Miss Dexter gives a flattering report of your aptitude for acquiring languages, and assures me that you will soon speak Italian fluently."

"Miss Dexter doubtless believes that praise of a pupil reflects credit on the skill of the teacher. Unfortunately for her flattering estimate of me, I must disclaim all polyglot proclivities, and have no intention of eclipsing Mezzofanti, Max Muller, or Giovanni Pico Mirandola. I needed, for a special purpose, a limited acquaintance with Italian; and, as I have attained what I desired, I shall not trouble myself much longer with dictionaries and grammars."

"And that special purpose—"

"Concerns nobody else, consequently I keep it to myself."

He turned from her and advanced to meet his ward, who came rapidly forward, holding out both hands.

"Doctor, where have you been all day? I did not see you at breakfast or dinner, and it seems quite an age since yesterday afternoon. You see I am moping, horribly."

"My dear child, I see you are looking pale and weary, which is overt and unpardonable treason. I sent for you to ask if it would be agreeable to you to walk, or drive with me."

"Certainly,—either or both."

She had placed her hands in his, and stood looking up joyfully into his quiet countenance.

"Get your hat, while I order my buggy brought to the door."

"Thank you, my dear doctor. The very thing I longed for, as I noticed you riding up the avenue. I never saw you on horseback until to-day. It is a delightful evening for a drive."

She gaily swung his hands, like a gratified child, and started off for her hat, but, ere she crossed the threshold, turned back, and, walking up to her guardian, laid her arm on his shoulder and whispered something.

Digitized by Google

He laughed, and put his hand under her chin, saying, as he did so, —

"Little witch! How did you know it?"

Her reply was audible only to the ears for which it was framed, and she darted away, evidently much happier than she had seemed for many days.

While awaiting her return, Dr. Grey picked up her sketch-book, and was examining the contents, when Salome rose and hurried towards the door. As she passed him, his back was turned, and her muslin dress swept within reach of his spur, which caught the delicate fabric. She impatiently jerked the dress to disengage it, but it clung to the steel points, and a long rent was made in the muslin. With a half-smothered ejaculation, she tried to wrench herself free, but the dress only tore across the breadth from seam to seam. Dr. Grey turned, and stooped to assist her.

"Wait an instant, Salome; you have almost ruined your dress."

He was endeavoring to disentangle the shreds from the jagged edge of the spur, but she bent down, and, seizing the skirt in both hands, tore it away, leaving a large fragment trailing from the boot-heel.

"'More haste, less speed.' Patience is better than petulance, my young friend."

His grave, reproving voice, rendered her defiant; and, with a forced, unnatural laugh, she bowed, and hurried away, saying, as she looked over her shoulder, —

"And spurs than persuasion? You mistake my nature."

Dr. Grey had been riding, all the morning, across a broken stretch of country, where the roads were exceedingly insecure, and, as he removed the troublesome spur and laid it on the mantel-piece, he folded up the strip of muslin and put it into his pocket.

"I am waiting for you," cried Muriel, from the hall door.

He sighed, and went to his buggy; but the cloud did not melt from his brow, for, as he drove off, he noticed Salome's gleaming eyes peering from the window of her room; and pity

Digitized by Google

and pain mingled in the emotions with which he recalled his sister's warning words.

"Muriel, here is your letter, and, better still, Gerard will be with us to-morrow. Diplomatic affairs brought him temporarily to Washington, and he will spend next week with us. I cordially congratulate you, my dear child, and hastened home to bring you the good news, which I felt assured you would prefer to receive without witnesses."

Muriel's blushing face was bent over her letter; but she put her hand on her guardian's, and pressed it vigorously.

"A thousand thanks for all your goodness! Gerard writes that it was through your influence he was enabled to visit Washington; and, indeed, dear Dr. Grey, we are both very grateful for your kind interest in our happiness. Even poor papa could not be more considerate."

"For several days past I have observed that you were unusually depressed, and that Miss Dexter looked constrained. Are you not pleasantly situated in my sister's house? Do not hesitate to speak frankly."

Muriel's eyes filled with tears, and she answered, evasively,—

"Miss Jane is very kind and affectionate."

"Which means that Salome is not."

"Dr. Grey, why does she dislike me so seriously? I have tried to be friendly and cordial towards her; but she constantly repels me. I really admire her very much; but I am afraid she positively hates me."

"No, that is impossible; but she is a very peculiar, and, I am sorry to be forced to say, an unamiable girl, and is governed by every idle caprice. I hope that you will not allow yourself to be annoyed by any want of courtesy which she may unfortunately have displayed. Although a member of the household, Salome has no right to dispense or to withhold the hospitalities of my sister's home, or to insult her guests; and I trust that her individual whims will have no effect whatever upon you, unless they create a feeling of compassion and toleration in your kind heart. She has some good traits hidden under her

Digitized by Google

brusquerie, and when you know her better you will excuse her rudeness."

"Why is she so moody? I have not seen a pleasant smile on her face since I came here."

"My dear child, let us select some more agreeable topic for discussion. Gerard will probably arrive on the early train, which will enable him to breakfast with us to-morrow. He will endeavor to persuade you to return at once to Europe; but I must tell you, in advance of his proposal, that I hope you will not yield to his wishes, since it would grieve me to part with you so soon."

Muriel turned aside her head to avoid her guardian's penetrating gaze, and silently listened to his counsel concerning the course she should pursue towards her betrothed.

For a year they had been affianced without the knowledge of her father, from whom she had been separated; but the frankness with which both had discussed the matter with Dr. Grey forbade the possibility of his withholding his approbation of the engagement; though he assured them he could not consent to its speedy consummation, as Muriel was too young and childish to appreciate the grave responsibility of such a step. Gerard Granville was several years older than his betrothed, and Dr. Grey had been astonished at his choice; but a long and intimate acquaintance led him to esteem the young man so highly, that, while he felt that Muriel was far inferior, he strove to stimulate her ambition, and hoped she would one day be fully worthy of him.

To-day Dr. Grey drove for an hour through quiet, unfrequented country roads; and finally, when Muriel expressed herself anxious to catch a glimpse of the sea and a breath of its brine, he turned into a narrow track that led down to some fishermen's huts on the beach.

While they paused on the edge of the low, yellow strand, and inhaled the fresh ocean air, Dr. Grey grew silent, and his companion fell into a blissful reverie relative to to-morrow's events. Suddenly he placed his hand on her arm, and said, "Listen! What a wonderfully sweet, flexible voice! Surely,

Digitized by Google

fishermen's wives are not singing Mendelssohn's compositions? Did you hear that gush of melody? It comes not from that house, but seems floating from the opposite direction. Such strains almost revive one's faith in the Hindoo *Gandharvas*,—musical genii, filling the air with ravishing sounds. There! is it not exquisite? Hold these reins while I ascertain who owns that marvellous voice."

Eager and curious as a boy, he sprang from the buggy, and, following the bend of the beach, passed two small deserted huts, and plunged into a grove of stunted trees, whence issued the sound that attracted his attention. Ere he had proceeded many yards he saw a woman sitting on a bank of sand and oyster-shells, and singing from an open sheet of music, while she made rapid gestures with one hand. Her face was turned from him, but, as he cautiously approached, the *pose* of the figure, the noble contour of the head and neck, and a certain muslin dress which matched the strip in his pocket, made his heart beat violently. Intent only on solving the mystery, he stepped softly towards her; but just then a brace of plover started up at his feet, and, as they whirred away, the woman turned her head, and he found himself face to face with his musician.

"Salome!"

"Well, Dr. Grey."

She had risen, and a beautiful glow overspread her cheeks, as she met his eyes.

"What brings you to this lonely spot, three miles from home, when the sun has already gone down?"

"Have I not as unquestionable a right to walk alone to the seaside as you to drive your ward whithersoever you list? Poverty, as well as wealth, sometimes makes people strangely independent. What have you done with Miss Muriel Manton?"

There was such a sparkle in her eyes, such a bright flush on her polished cheeks and parted lips, that Dr. Grey wondered at her beauty, which had never before impressed him as so extraordinary.

Digitized by Google

"Salome, why have you concealed your musical gift from me? Who taught you to sing?"

"I am teaching myself, with such poor aid as I can obtain from that miserable vagabond, Barilli, who is generally intoxicated three days out of every six. Did you expect to find Heine's yellow-haired Loreley, or a treacherous Ligeia, sitting on a rock, wooing passers-by to speedy destruction?"

"I certainly did not expect to meet my friend Salome alone at this hour and place. Child, do not trifle with me, — be truthful. Did you come here to meet any one?"

"One never knows what may or may not happen. I came here to practise my music lesson, *sans* auditors, and I meet Dr. Grey, — the last person I expected or desired to see."

He came a step nearer, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Salome, you distress and perplex me. My child, are you better or worse than I think you?"

She lifted her slender hand and laid it lightly on his, which still rested upon her shoulder.

"I am both, — better and worse. Better in aim than you believe; worse in execution than you could realize, even if I confessed all, which I have not the slightest intention of doing. Ah, Dr. Grey, if you read me thoroughly, you would not be surprised, or consider it presumptuous that I sometimes think I am that anomalous creature, whom Balzac defined as 'Angel through love, demon through fantasy, child through faith, sage through experience, man through the brain, woman through the heart, giant through hope, and poet through dreams.'"

As Dr. Grey looked down into the splendid eyes, softened and magnified by a crystal veil of unshed tears, he sighed, and answered, —

"You are, indeed, a bundle of contradictions. Why have you so sedulously concealed the existence of your fine voice, which the majority of girls would have been eager to exhibit?"

"It was not lack of vanity, but excess, that prompted me to keep you in ignorance, until I could astonish you by its perfection. You have anticipated me only by a few days, and I intended singing for you next week."

Digitized by Google

"It is not prudent for you to venture so far from home, especially at this hour."

"We paupers are not so fastidious as our lucky superiors, and cannot afford timid airs, and affectation of extreme nervousness. Having no escort, and expecting none, I walk alone in any direction I choose, with what fearlessness and contentment I find myself able to command."

"It will be dark before you can reach the public road."

"No, sir; there is a young moon swinging above the tree-tops, to light me on my lonesome ramble; and I come here so often that even the rabbits and whippoorwills know me. Where is Miss Muriel?"

"Waiting in the buggy, on the beach. I must go back to her."

"Yes. Pray do not delay an instant, or she will imagine that some dire calamity has befallen her knight, who, in hunting a siren, encountered Scylla or Charybdis. Good evening, Dr. Grey."

"I am unwilling to leave you here so unprotected. Come and ride with Muriel, and I will walk beside the buggy. My horse is so gentle that a child can guide him."

"Thank you. Not for a ten-acre lot in Mohammed's Paradise would I mar Miss Muriel's happiness, or punish myself by a *tête-à-tête* with her. It would be positively 'discourteous' in me to accept your proposal; and, moreover, I abhor division, — *tout ou rien*."

"Wilful, silly child! It is not proper for you to wander along that dreary road in the dark. Come with me."

"Not I. Make yourself easy by recollecting that 'naught is never in danger.' See yonder in the west, —

> 'Where, lo! above the sandy sunset rose
> The silver sickle of the green-gowned witch.'"

She laughed lightly, derisively, and collected the sheets of music scattered on the bank.

Digitized by Google

Silently Dr. Grey returned to his ward, who exclaimed, at sight of him, —

"I am glad to see you again, for you stayed so long I was growing frightened. Did you find the singer?"

"Yes."

"What is the matter? You look troubled and solemn."

"I am merely annoyed by circumstances beyond my control."

"Dr. Grey, who was that sweet singer?"

"Salome Owen."

"How can such a thing be possible, when I have never heard a note from her lips? You told me she had no musical talent."

"I was not aware that she sang at all, until this afternoon, and your surprise does not equal mine."

"Where did you find her?"

"Sitting on a mound of sand, singing to the sea."

"Who is with her?"

"No one. I requested her to come with us, and offered to walk beside my buggy; but she declined. Please be so considerate as to say nothing about this occurrence, when you reach home; because animadversion only hardens that poor girl in her whimsical ways. Now we will dismiss the matter."

Muriel endeavored to render herself an agreeable companion during the remainder of the drive; but her guardian, despite his efforts to become interested in her conversation, was evidently *distrait*, and both felt relieved when they reached Grassmere, where Miss Jane and the governess welcomed their return.

Dr. Grey dismissed his buggy and entered the hall; but passed through the house, and, crossing the orchard, followed the road leading seaward.

Only a few summer stars were sprinkling their silvery rays over the gray gloom of twilight, and the shining crescent in the violet west had slipped down behind the silent hills that girded the rough, winding road.

When Salome put her fingers on the gloved hand which, in the surprise of their unexpected meeting, Dr. Grey had involuntarily placed on her shoulder, she had felt that he shrank

Digitized by Google

instantly from her touch, and withdrew his hand hastily, as if displeased with the familiarity of the action. All the turbid elements in her nature boiled up. Could it be possible that he really loved his rosy-faced, bright-eyed, prattling ward? She set this conjecture squarely before her, and forced herself to contemplate it. If he desired to marry Muriel, of course he would do so whenever he chose, and the thought that he might call her his wife, and give her his name, his caresses, wrung a cry of agony from Salome's lips. She threw herself on the sand-bank, and, resting her chin on her folded arms, gazed vacantly across the yellow strand at the glassy, leaden sea that stared back mockingly at her.

She was too miserable to feel afraid of anything but Dr. Grey's marriage; and, moreover, she had so often, during the early years of her life, gone to and fro in the darkness, that she was a stranger to that timidity which girls usually indulge under similar circumstances. The fishermen had abandoned the neighboring huts some months before, and "Solitude," one mile distant, was the nearest spot occupied by human beings.

She neither realized nor cared that it was growing darker, and, after awhile, when the sea was no longer visible through the dun haze that brooded over it, she shut her eyes and moaned.

Dr. Grey had walked on, hoping every moment to meet her returning home; and, more than once, he was tempted to retrace his steps, thinking that she might have taken some direct path across the hills, instead of the circuitous one bending around their base. Quickening his pace till it matched his pulse, which an indefinable anxiety accelerated, he finally saw the huts dimly outlined against the starry sky and quiet sea.

Pausing, he took off his hat to listen to

"The water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds,"

and, while he stood wiping his brow, there came across the beach,—

Digitized by Google

"A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come since the making of the world."

In the uncertain light he ran towards the clump of trees where he had left Salome, and strained his eyes to discover some moving thing. He knew that he must be very near the spot, but neither the expected sound nor object greeted him, and, while he stopped and held his breath to listen, the silence was profound and death-like. He was opening his lips to call the girl's name, when he fancied he saw something move slightly, and simultaneously a human voice smote the oppressive stillness. She was very near him, and he heard her saying to herself, with mournful emphasis, —

"Have I brought Joy, and slain her at his feet?
Have I brought Peace, for his cold kiss to kill?
Have I brought Youth, crowned with wild-flowers sweet,
With sandals dewy from a morning hill,
For his gray, solemn eyes, to fright and chill?
Have I brought Scorn the pale, and Hope the fleet,
And First Love, in her lily winding-sheet, —
And is he pitiless still?"

Dr. Grey knew now that she was not crying. Her hard, ringing, bitter tone, forbade all thought of sobs or tears; but his heart ached as he listened, and surmised the application she was making of the melancholy lines.

Unwilling that she should know he had overheard her, he waited a moment, then raised his voice and shouted, —

"Salome! Salome! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and, fearing that she might elude him, he stretched out his arms, and advanced to the spot, which he felt assured was only a few yards distant.

She had risen, and, standing in the gloom of the coming night, deepened by the interlacing boughs above her, she felt Dr. Grey's hand on her dress, then on her head, where the moisture hung heavily in her thick hair.

Digitized by Google

"Salome, why do you not answer me?"

Shame kept her silent.

He passed his hand over her hot face, then groped for her fingers, which he grasped firmly in his.

"Come home with your best friend."

He knew that she was in no mood to submit to reprimand, to appreciate argument, or even to listen to entreaty, and that he might as profitably undertake to knead pig-iron as expostulate with her at this juncture.

For a mile they walked on without uttering a word; then he felt the fingers relax, twitch, and twine closely around his own.

"Dr. Grey, where is Muriel? Where is your buggy?"

"Both are at home, where others should have been, long ago."

"You walked back to meet me?"

"I did."

"How did you find me, in the dark?"

"I heard your voice."

"But not the words?"

"Why? Are you ashamed for me to hear what any strolling stranger, any unscrupulous vagabond, might have listened to?"

"It is such a desolate, lonely place, I thought no one would stumble upon me, and I have been there so often without meeting a living thing except the crabs and plover."

"You are no longer a child, and such rashness is altogether unpardonable. What do you suppose my sister would think of your imprudent obstinacy?"

They walked another mile, and again Salome convulsively pressed the cool, steady, strong hand, in which hers lay hot and quivering.

"Dr. Grey, tell me the truth,—don't torture me."

"What shall I tell you? You torture yourself."

"Did you hear what I was saying to my own heart?"

"I heard you repeating some lines which certainly should possess no relevancy for the real feeling of my young friend."

Digitized by Google

She snatched her fingers from his, and he knew she covered her face with them.

They reached the gate at the end of the avenue, and Salome stopped suddenly, as the lights from the front windows flashed out on the lawn

"Go in, and leave me."

She threw herself on the sward, under one of the elm-trees, and leaned her head against its trunk.

"I shall do no such thing, unless you desire the entire household to comment upon your reckless conduct."

"Oh, Dr. Grey, I care little now what the whole world thinks or says! Let me be quiet, or I shall go mad."

"No; come into the house, and sing something to compensate me for the anxiety and fatigue you have cost me. I do not often ask a favor of you, and certainly in this instance you will not refuse to grant my request."

She did not reply, and he bent down and softly stroked the hair that was damp with dew and sea-fog.

The long-pent storm broke in convulsive sobs, and she trembled from head to foot, while tears poured over her burning cheeks.

"Poor child! Can you not confide in me?"

"Dr. Grey, will you forget all that has passed to-day? Will you try never to think of it again?"

"On condition that you never repeat the offence."

"You do not despise me?"

"No."

"You pity me?"

"I pity any human being who is so unfortunate as to possess your wilful, perverse, passionate disposition. Unless you overcome this dangerous tendency of character, you may expect only wretchedness and humiliation in coming years. I am sincerely sorry for you, but I tell you unhesitatingly, that I find it difficult to tolerate your grave and obtrusive faults."

She raised her clasped hands, and said, brokenly,—

"This is the last time I shall ever ask you to forgive me Will you?"

Digitized by Google

"As freely and fully as a grieved brother ever forgave a wayward sister."

He took the folded hands, lifted her from the grass, and led her to a side door opening upon the east gallery.

"Dr. Grey, give me one kind word before I go."

The lamp-light from the hall shone full on his pale face, which was sterner than she had ever seen it, as he forcibly withdrew his hands from her tight clasp, and, putting her away from him, said, very coldly,—

"I exhausted my store of kind thoughts and words when I called you my sister."

He saw that she understood him, for she tried to hide her face, but a spasm passed over it, and she would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms and carried her up to her own room.

Stanley was asleep with his head pillowed on his open geography, but the candle burned beside him, and Dr. Grey placed Salome on a lounge near the window, and sprinkled her face with water.

Kneeling by the low couch, he rubbed her hands vigorously with some cologne he found on her bureau; and, watching her pale, beautiful features, his heart swelled with compassion, and his calm eyes grew misty. Consciousness very soon returned, and when she saw the noble, sorrowful countenance, bent anxiously over her, she covered her face with her hands and moaned rather than spoke,—

"I can't endure your pity. Leave me with my self-contempt and degradation."

"My little sister, I leave you in God's merciful hands, and trust you to the guidance of your womanly pride and self-respect. Good-night. We will not engrave this unfortunate day on our tablets, but forget its record, save one fact, that for all time it makes me your brother; and, Salome,—

"'So we'll not dream, nor look back, dear,
But march right on, content and bold,
To where our life sets heavenly clear,—
Westward, behind the hills of gold.'"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI.

"MR. GREY, who is that beautiful girl to whom Muriel introduced me this morning? I was so absorbed in admiration of her face that I lost her name."

As he spoke, Mr. Gerard Granville struck the ashes from his cigar, and walked up to the table where Dr. Grey was sealing some letters.

"Her name is Salome Owen, and she is my sister's adopted child."

"What is her age, if I may be pardoned such impertinent queries?"

"I believe she has entered her eighteenth year."

"She is a regal beauty, and shows proud blood as plainly as any princess."

"Take care, Granville; imagination has cantered away with your penetration. Salome's family were coarse and common, though doubtless honest people. Her father was a drunken miller, who died in an attack of delerium tremens, and left his children as a legacy to the county. I merely mention these deplorable facts to show you that your boasted penetration is not entirely infallible."

"Miller or millionnaire,—the girl would grace any court in Europe, and only lacks a dash of *aplomb* to make her irresistible. I have seen few faces that attracted and interested me so powerfully."

"Yes, she certainly is very handsome; but I do not agree with you in thinking that she lacks *aplomb*. Granville, if you have finished your cigar, we will adjourn to the parlor, where the ladies are taking their tea."

Dr. Grey collected his letters and walked away, followed by his guest; and, a moment after, a low, scornful laugh, floated in through the window which opened on the little flower-garden.

Miss Jane had requested Salome to gather the seeds of some apple and nutmeg geraniums that were arranged on a shelf near

Digitized by Google

the western window of the library; and, while stooping over the china jars, and screened from observation by a spreading lilac-bush, the girl had heard the conversation relative to herself.

Excessive vanity had never been numbered among the faults that marred her character, but Dr. Grey's indifference to personal attractions, which strangers admitted so readily, piqued, and thoroughly aroused a feeling that was destined to bring countless errors and misfortunes in its train; and, henceforth,—

> "There was not a high thing out of heaven,
> Her pride o'ermastereth not."

Hitherto the love of one man had been the only boon she craved of heaven; but now, conscious that the darling hope of her life was crushed and withering under Dr. Grey's relentless feet, she resolved that the admiration of the world should feed her insatiable hunger,—a maddening hunger which one tender word from his true lips would have assuaged,—but which she began to realize he would never utter.

During the last eighteen hours, a mournful change had taken place in her heart, where womanly tenderness was rapidly retreating before unwomanly hate, bitterness, and blasphemous defiance; and she laughed scornfully at the "idiocy" that led her to weary heaven with prayers for the preservation of a life that must ever run as an asymptote to her own. How earnestly she now lamented an escape, for which she had formerly exhausted language in expressing her gratitude; and how much better it would have been if she could mourn him as dead, instead of jealously watching him,—living without a thought of her.

All the girlish sweetness and freshness of her nature passed away, and an intolerable weariness and disappointment usurped its place. Since her acquaintance with Dr. Grey, he had been her sole *Melek Taous*, adored with Yezidi fervor; but to-day she overturned, and strove to revile and desecrate the idol, to whose vacant pedestal she lifted a colossal vanity. Her bruised, numb heart, seemed incapable of loving any one, or anything, and a hatred and contempt of her race took possession of her.

Digitized by Google

The changing hues of Muriel's tell tale face when Mr. Granville arrived, and the excessive happiness that could not be masked, had not escaped Salome's lynx vision; and very accurately she conjectured the real condition of affairs, relative to which Dr. Grey had never uttered a syllable. Bent upon mischief, she had, malice prepense, dressed herself with unusual care, and arranged her hair in a new style of coiffure, which proved very becoming.

Now, as the hum of conversation mingled with the sound of Muriel's low, soft laugh, reached her from the parlor, her chatoyant eyes kindled, and she hastily went in to join the merry circle.

"Come here, child, and sit by me." said Miss Jane, making room on the sofa, as her *protégée* entered.

"Thank you, I prefer a seat near the window."

Dr. Grey sat in a large chair in the centre of the floor, with Muriel on an ottoman close to him, and Mr. Granville leaned over the back of the chair, while Miss Dexter shared Miss Jane's old-fashioned ample sofa. In full view of the whole party, Salome seated herself at a little distance, and, with admirably assumed nonchalance, began to enclose and sew up the geranium-seeds, in some pretty, colored paper bags, prepared for the purpose.

After a few minutes Mr. Granville sauntered across the room, looked at the cuckoo clock, and finally went over to the window, where he leaned against the facing and watched Salome's slender white fingers.

She was dressed in a delicate muslin, striped with narrow pink lines, and flounced at the bottom of the skirt, and wore a ribbon sash of the same color; while in the broad braids of hair raised high on her head, she had fastened a superb half-blown Baron Provost rose, just where two long glossy curls crept down. The puffed sleeves, scarcely reaching the elbows, displayed the finely rounded white arms, and the exactness with which the airy muslin fitted her form, showed its symmetrical outline to the greatest advantage.

Muriel touched her guardian, and whispered,—

Digitized by Google

"Did you ever see Salome look so beautiful? Her coiffure to-night is almost Parisian, and how very becoming!"

Dr. Grey was studying the innocent, happy countenance of his unsuspecting ward, and he could not repress a sigh, when, turning his eyes towards Salome, he noticed the undisguised admiration in Mr. Granville's earnest gaze.

A nameless dread made him take Muriel's hand and lead her to the piano.

"Play something for me. I am music-hungry."

"Is Saul sad to-night?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"A little fatigued and perplexed, and anxious to have his cares exorcised by the magic of your fingers."

With womanly tact she selected a *fantasia* which Mr. Granville had often pronounced the gem of her *repertoire*, and momentarily expected to hear his whispered thanks; but page after page was turned, and still her lover did not approach the piano, where Dr. Grey stood with folded arms and slightly contracted brows. Muriel played brilliantly, and was pardonably proud of her proficiency, which Mr. Granville had confessed first attracted his attention; and to-night, when the piece was concluded and she commenced a *Polonaise*, she looked over her shoulder hoping to meet a grateful, fond glance. But his eyes were riveted on the fair rosy face at his side, and his betrothed bit her pouting lip and made sundry blunders.

As she rose from the piano-stool, Mr. Granville exclaimed,—

"Miss Muriel, you love music so well that I trust you will add your persuasions to mine, and induce Miss Owen to sing for us, as she declares she is comparatively a tyro in instrumental music, and would not venture to perform in your presence."

"She has never sung for me, but I hope she will not refuse your request. Salome, will you not oblige us?"

Muriel's eyes were dim with tears, but her sweet voice did not falter.

"I was not aware that you sang at all," said Miss Dexter, looking up from a mat which she was crocheting.

"She has a fine voice, but is very obstinate in declining to

Digitized by Google

use it. Come, Salome, don't be childish, dear. Sing something," coaxed Miss Jane.

The girl waited a few seconds, hoping that another voice would swell the general request, but the lips she loved best were mute; and, suddenly tossing the paper bags from her lap, she rose and moved proudly to the piano.

"Miss Manton, will you or Miss Dexter be so kind as to play my accompaniment for me? I am neither Liszt, nor Thalberg, and the vocal gymnastics are all that I can venture to undertake."

Muriel promptly resumed her seat before the instrument, and played the symphony of an aria from "Favorite," which Salome placed on the piano-board. Barilli had assured her that she rendered this fiery burst of rage and hatred as well as he had ever heard it; and, folding her fingers tightly around each other, she drew herself up to her full height, and sang it.

Mr. Granville leaned against the piano, and Dr. Grey was standing in the recess of the window when the song began, but ere long he moved forward unconsciously and paused, with his hand on his ward's shoulder and his eyes riveted in astonishment on Salome's countenance. She knew that the approbation and delight of this small audience was worth all the *encore* shouts of the millions who might possibly applaud her in future years; and if ever a woman's soul poured itself out through her lips, all that was surging in Salome's heart became visible to the man who listened as if spell-bound.

Miss Jane grasped her crutches, and rose, leaning upon them, while a look of mingled joy and wonder made her sallow face eloquent; and Miss Dexter dropped her ivory needle, and gazed in amazement at the singer. Muriel forgot her chords, — turned partially around, and watched in breathless surprise the marvellous execution of several difficult passages, where the rich voice seemed to linger while improvising sparkling turns and trills that were strangely intricate, and indescribably sweet.

As she approached the close of her song, Salome became temporarily oblivious of pride, wounded vanity, and murdered hopes, — forgot all but the man at her side, for whose commen-

Digitized by Google

dation she had toiled so patiently, and turning her flushed, radiant face, towards him, her magnificent eyes aflame with triumph looked appealingly up at his, and her hands were extended till they rested on his arm.

So the song ended, and for a moment the parlor was still as a tomb. Dr. Grey silently enclosed the girl's two hands in his, and, for the first time since she had known him, Salome saw tears swimming in his grave, beautiful eyes, and noticed a slight tremor on his usually steady lips.

"There is nothing in the old world or the new comparable to that voice, and I flatter myself I speak *ex cathedra*. Miss Owen, you will soon have the public at your feet."

She did not heed Mr. Granville's enthusiastic eulogy. She saw nothing but Dr. Grey's admiring eyes,—felt nothing but the close warm clasp, in which her folded fingers lay,—and her ears ached for the sound of his deep voice.

"Salome, I shall not soon forgive you for keeping me in ignorance of the existence of the finest voice it has ever been my good fortune to hear. Knowing your adopted brother's fondness for music, how could you hoard your treasure so parsimoniously, denying him such happiness as you might have conferred?"

He untwined her fingers, which clung tenaciously to his, and saw that the blood ebbed out of cheeks and lips as she listened to his carefully guarded language. Silently she obeyed Miss Jane's summons to the sofa.

"You perverse witch! Where have you been practising all these months, that have made you such a wonderful cantatrice? Child, answer me."

"I did not wish to annoy the household by thrumming on the piano and afflicting their ears with false flat scales, consequently I followed the birds, and rehearsed with them, under the trees, and down on the edge of the sea. If you like my voice I am glad, because I have studied to perfect it."

"Like it, indeed! As if I could avoid liking it! But you must have had good training. Who taught you?"

"I took lessons from Barilli."

Digitized by Google

"Aha, — Ulpian! Now you can understand how he contrives to feed his family. Salome's sewing-money explains it all. Kiss me, dear. I always believed there was more in you than came to the surface."

"Miss Owen ought to go upon the stage. Such gifts as hers belong to the public, who would soon crown her queen of song."

Salome glanced at the handsome stranger, and bowed.

"It is my purpose, sir, to dedicate myself and future to the Opera, where I trust I shall not utterly fail, as I have been for a year studying with reference to this step."

A bomb-shell falling in that quiet circle, would scarcely have startled its members more effectually; and, anxious to avoid comment, Salome quitted the parlor and ran out on the lawn.

After awhile she heard Muriel's skilful touch on the piano, and, when an hour had elapsed, the echo of voices died away, and soon a profound silence seemed to reign over the house.

The hot blood was coursing thick and fast in her veins, and evil purposes brooded darkly over her oppressed and throbbing heart. She was thoroughly cognizant of the intense admiration with which Mr. Granville regarded her, and to-night she had compared his handsome face with the older, graver, and less regular features of Dr. Grey, and wondered why the latter was so much more fascinating. Her beauty transcended Muriel's, and it would prove an easy task to supplant her in the affections of her not very ardent lover. Life in Paris, spiced with the political intrigues incident to diplomatic circles, would divert her thoughts, and might possibly make the coming years endurable. Was the game worth the candle? No thought of Muriel's misery entered for an instant into this entirely sordid calculation, or would have deterred her even momentarily, had it presented itself in expostulation. The girl's heart had suddenly grown callous, and her hand would have ruthlessly smitten down any object that dared to cross her path, or retard the accomplishment of her schemes. Weary at last of pacing the dim starlit avenue, and yet too wretched to think of sleeping, she reëntered the house, and cautiously locking the door, threw herself into a

Digitized by Google

corner of the parlor sofa, which stood just beneath the portrait she so often studied.

If she had not at this juncture been completely absorbed in gazing upon it, she might have seen the original, who soon rose and came forward from the shadow of the curtains.

"Salome, I wish to make you my confidante,—to tell you something which I have not yet mentioned even to Janet. Can I trust you, little sister?"

Resting against the arm of the sofa, he looked intently into her face, reading its perturbed lines.

"I presume you are amusing yourself by tantalizing my curiosity, as your experiments appear to have thoroughly satisfied you that I am utterly unworthy of trust. I follow the flattering advice you were so kind as to give me some time since, and make no promises, which shatter like crystal under the hammer of the first temptation. You see, sir, you are teaching me to be cautious."

"You are teaching yourself lessons in dissimulation and maliciousness, that you will heartily rue some day, but your repentance will come too tardily to mend the mischief."

She tried to screen her countenance, but he was in no mood for trifling, and putting his palm under her chin, forced her to submit to his scrutiny.

"Salome, if I did not cherish a strong faith in the latent generosity of your soul, I would not come to you as I do now to offer confidence, and demand it in return."

She guessed his meaning, and her eyes glowed with all the baleful light that he had hoped was extinguished forever.

"Dr. Grey makes a grace of necessity, and a pretence of confiding that which has ceased to be a secret. Is such his boasted candor and honesty?"

"If I believed that you were already acquainted with what I propose to divulge, I would not fritter away my time in appealing to a nobility of feeling which that fact alone would prove the hopelessness of my ever finding in you."

He felt her face grow hot, and for an instant her eyes drooped before his, stern and almost threatening.

Digitized by Google

"Well, sir; I wait for your confidential disclosures. Is there a Guy Fawkes, or Titus Oates, plotting against the peace and prosperity of the house of Grey?"

"Verily I am disposed to apprehend that there may be."

She endeavored to wrench her face from his hand, but he held it firmly, and continued,—

"I wish to say to you that Muriel is very sensitive, and I hope that during Mr. Granville's visit, you will try to be as considerate and courteous as possible, to both. Salome, Gerard Granville has asked Muriel to be his wife, and she has promised to marry him at the expiration of a year."

The girl laughed derisively, and exclaimed,—

"Pray, Dr. Grey, be so good as to indulge me with your motive in furnishing this piece of information?"

"Your astuteness forbids the possibility of any doubt with reference to my motives,—which are, explicitly, anxiety for Muriel's happiness, and for the preservation of your integrity and self-respect."

"What jeopardizes either?"

"Your heartless, contemptible vanity, which tempts you to demand a homage and incense that should be offered only where it is due,—at another, and I grieve to add, a purer shrine."

"Ah! My unpardonable sin consists in having braided my black locks, and made myself comely! If you will procure an authentic portrait of the Witch of Endor, I will do proper penance by likening my appearance thereunto. Poor little rose! Can't you open your pink lips and cry *peccavi?* Come down, sole ally and accomplice of my heinous vanity, and plead for me, and make the *amends honorable* to this grim guardian of Miss Muriel's peace!"

She snatched the drooping rose from her hair, and tossed it at his feet.

"Salome, you forget yourself!"

His stern displeasure rendered her reckless, and she continued,—

"True, sir. I did forget that the poor miller's child had no right to obtrude her comeliness in the presence of the banker's

Digitized by Google

daughter. I confess my 'high crime and misdemeanor' against the pet of fortune, and await my condign punishment. Is it your sovereign will that I shear my shining locks like royal Berenice, and offer them in propitiation? Or, does it seem 'good, meet, and your bounden duty,' to have me promptly inoculated with small-pox, for the destruction of my skin, which is unjustifiably smoother and clearer than—"

"Hush, hush!"

He laid his hand over her lips; and, for a while, there was an awkward pause.

"If it were only possible to inoculate your heart with a little genuine womanly charity,—if it were possible to persuade you to adopt as your rule of conduct that golden one which Christ gave as a patent of peace to all who followed it. But it is futile, hopeless. You will not, you will not,—and my fluttering dove is at the mercy of a famished eagle, already poised to swoop. I 'reckoned without my host' when I so confidently appealed to your magnanimity, to your feminine integrity of soul. You are a 'deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.'"

"Which will not 'hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.' Dr. Grey, what has the pampered heiress, the happy *fiancée* of that handsome man up-stairs, to fear from the poverty-stricken daughter of a miller, who you conscientiously inform your guest passed from time to eternity through the gate opened by delirium tremens. Mark you, my 'adder ears' have not been sealed all the evening."

She had taken his hand from her lips, and thrown it from her.

"People who condescend to listen to conversations that are not intended for them, generally deserve the punishment of hearing unpleasant truths discussed. Salome, our interview is at an end."

"Not yet. Do you sincerely desire to see Muriel Mr. Granville's wife?"

"I do, because I know that she is strongly attached to him."

"And you are sufficiently generous to sacrifice your happiness, in order to promote hers? Oh, marvellous magnanimity!"

Digitized by Google

"Your insinuation is beneath my notice."

"How long have you known of her engagement?"

"Since the first interview I had with her, after her father's death."

"Let me see your face, Dr. Grey. If truth has not been hunted out of the earth, it took refuge in your eyes. There, I am satisfied. You never loved her. I think I must have been insane, or I would not have imagined it possible. No, no; she never touched your heart, save with a feeling of compassion. Don't go, I want to say something to you. Sit down, and let me think."

She walked up and down the room for ten minutes, and, with his face bowed on his hand, Dr. Grey watched and waited.

Finally he stooped to pick up the crushed rose on the floor, and then she came back and stood before him.

"I promise you I will not lay a straw in the path of Muriel's happiness, and it shall not be my fault if Mr. Granville fails in a lover's *devoir*. I was tempted to entice him from his sworn allegiance. Why should I deny what you know so well? But I will not, and when I give my word, it shall go hard with me but I keep it; especially when you hold the pledge. Are you satisfied? I know that you have little cause to trust me, but I tell you, sir, when I deceive you, then all heaven with its hierarchies of archangels can not save me."

After all, Ulpian Grey was only a man of flesh and blood, and his heart was touched by the beauty of the young face, and the mournful sweetness of the softened voice.

"Thank you, Salome. I accept your promise, and rely upon it. As a pledge of your sincerity I shall retain this rose, and return it to you when little Muriel is a happy wife."

She clasped her hands, and looked at him with a mournful, wistful expression, that puzzled him.

"My friend, my little sister, what is it? Tell me, and let me help you to do your duty, for I see that you are wrestling desperately with some great temptation."

"Dr. Grey, be merciful to me. Send me away. Oh, for God's sake, send me away!"

Digitized by Google

She had grown ghastly pale, and her whole face indexed a depth of anguish and despair that baffled utterance.

"My dear child, where do you desire to go? If your wishes are reasonable they shall be granted."

"Will you persuade Miss Jane to take Jessie in my place, and send me to France or Italy?"

"To study music with the intention of becoming a *prima donna?*"

"Yes, sir."

"My young friend, I cannot conscientiously advise a compliance with wishes so fraught with danger to yourself."

"You fear that my voice does not justify so expensive an experiment?"

"On the contrary, I have not a doubt that your extraordinary voice will lift you to the highest pinnacle of musical celebrity; and, because your career on the stage promises to prove so brilliant, I shudder in anticipating the temptations that will unavoidably assail you."

"You are afraid to trust me?"

"Yes, my little sister; you are so impulsive, so prone to hearken to evil dictates rather than good ones, that I dread the thought of seeing you launched into the dangerous career you contemplate, without some surer, safer, more infallible pilot than your proud, passionate heart. If you were homely, and a dullard, I should entertain less apprehension about your future."

Her broad brow blackened with a frown that became a terrible scowl, and her eyes gleamed like lightning under the edge of a thunderous summer cloud.

"What is it to you whether I live or die? The immaculate soul of Ulpian Grey, M.D., will serenely wing its way up through the stars, on and on to the great Gates of Pearl,—oblivious of the beggar who, from the lowest Hades, where she has fallen, eagerly watches his flight."

"The anxious soul of Ulpian Grey will pray for yours, as long as we remain on earth. Salome, I am the truest friend you will ever find this side of the City of God; and, when I see

Digitized by Google

you plunging madly into ruin, I shall snatch you back, cost me what it may. Your jeers and struggles have not deterred me hitherto, nor shall they henceforth. You are as incapable of guiding yourself aright, as a rudderless bark is of stemming the gulf-stream in a south-west gale; and I am afraid to trust you out of my sight."

"Yes, I understand you; the good angel in your nature pities the demon in mine. But your pity stifles me; I could not endure it; and, besides, I cannot stay here any longer. I must go out into the world, and seize the fortune that people tell me my voice will certainly yield me."

Flush and sparkle had died out of her face, which, in its worn, haggard pallor, looked five years older than when she entered the parlor, three hours before.

"Pecuniary considerations must not influence you, because, while Janet and I live, you shall want nothing; and when either dies, you will be liberally provided for. Dismiss from your mind a matter that has long been decided, and which no wish of yours can annul or alter."

With an impatient wave of the hand, she answered, —

"Give to poor little Jessie and Stanley what was intended for me. They are helpless, but I can take care of myself; and, moreover, I am not contented here. I want to see something of the world in which — *bon gré mal gré* — I find myself. Let me go. Rousseau was a sage. '*Le monde est le livre des femmes.*'"

He shook his head, and said, sorrowfully, —

"No, your instincts are unreliable; and if you roam away from Jane and from me, you will sip more poison than honey. Be wise, and remain where Providence has placed you. I will bring Jessie here, and you shall teach her what you choose, and Stanley can command all the educational advantages he will improve. After a while, you shall, if you prefer it, have a pleasant home of your own, and dwell there with the two little ones. Such has long been my scheme and purpose; but, during my sister's life, she will never consent to give you up; and you

Digitized by Google

owe it to her not to desert her in the closing years, when she most urgently requires the solace of your love and society."

Salome covered her face with her hands, and something like a heavy dry sob shook her frame; but the spring of bitterness seemed exhaustless, and her voice was indescribably scornful in its defiant ring.

"You are very charitable, Dr. Grey, and I thank you for all your embryonic benevolent plans for me and my pauper relatives; but I have drawn a very different map for my future years. You seem to regard this house as a second "*La Tour sans venin*," which, like its prototype near Grenoble, possesses an atmosphere fatal to all poisonous, noxious things; but surely you forget that it has long sheltered me."

"No, it has never arrogated the prerogative of '*La Tour sans venin*,' but of one thing, my poor wilful child, you shall never have reason to be skeptical, — that dear Jane and I will indefatigably strive to serve you as faithfully and successfully, as did in ancient days, the Psylli whom Plutarch immortalized."

While he spoke Dr. Grey had been turning over the leaves of the old family Bible, which happened to lie within his reach; and now, without premonition, he read aloud the fifty-fifth Psalm.

She listened, not willingly, but *ex necessitate rei*, and rebelliously; and, when he finished the Psalm, and knelt, with his face on his arms, which were crossed upon the back of a chair, she stood haughtily erect and motionless beside him.

His prayer was brief and fervent, that God would aid her in her efforts to curb her passionate temper, and to walk in accordance with the teachings of Jesus; and that he would especially over-rule all things, and guide her decision in the important step she contemplated. He rose, and turned towards her, but her countenance was hidden.

"Good night, Salome. God bless you and direct you."

She raised her face, and her eyes sought his with a long, questioning, pleading gaze, so full of anguish that he could scarcely endure it. Then he saw the last spark of hope expire;

Digitized by Google

and she bent her queenly head an instant, and silently passed from the parlor.

"I have watched my first and holiest hopes depart,
One after one;
I have held the hand of Death upon my heart,
And made no moan."

CHAPTER XVII.

"PARDON my intrusion, Mrs. Gerome, and ascribe it to Elsie's anxiety concerning your health. In compliance with her request, I have come to ascertain whether you really require my attention."

Dr. Grey placed his hat and gloves on the piano, and established himself comfortably in a large chair near the arch, where Mrs. Gerome, palette in hand, sat before her easel.

"Elsie's nerves have run away with her sound common sense, and filled her mind with vagaries. She imagines that I need medicine, whereas I only require quiet and peace, which neither she nor you will permit me to enjoy."

She did not even glance at the visitor, but mixed some colors rapidly, and deepened the rose-tints in a cluster of apple-blossoms she was scattering in the foreground of a picture.

"If it is not of vital importance that those pearly petals should be finished immediately, I should be glad to have you turn your face towards me for a few moments. There,—thank you. Mrs. Gerome, do I look like a nervous, whimsical man, whose fancy mastered his professional judgment, or blunted his acumen?"

"You certainly appear as phlegmatic, as utterly unimaginative, as any lager-loving German, whom Teniers or Ostade ever painted '*Unter den linden.*'"

"Then my words should possess some influence when they

Digitized by Google

corroborate Elsie's statement, that you are far from well. Do not be childishly incredulous, and impatiently shake your head; from a woman of your age and sense one expects more dignity and prudence."

"Sir, your rudeness has at least a flavor of stern honesty that makes it almost palatable. Do you propose to take my case into your skilful hands?"

"I merely propose to expostulate with you upon the unfortunate and ruinous course of life you have decided to pursue. No eremite of the Thebaid, or the Nitroon, is more completely immured than I find you; and the seclusion from society is quite as deleterious as the want of out-door air and sunshine. Your mind, debarred from communion with your race and denied novel and refreshing themes, centres in its own operations and creations, broods over threadbare topics until it has grown morbid; and, instead of deriving healthful nourishment from the world that surrounds it, exhausts and consumes itself, like fabled Arachne, spinning its substance into filmy nothings."

"Filmy nothings! Thank you. I flatter myself, when I am safely housed under marble, the world will place a different estimate upon some things I shall leave behind to challenge criticism."

"How much value will public plaudits possess for ears sealed by death? Mrs. Gerome, you are too lonely; you must have companionship that will divert your thoughts."

"Not I, indeed! All that I require, I have in abundance, — music, books, and my art. Here I am independent, for remember that he was a petted son of fame, who said, 'Books are the true Elysian fields, where the spirits of the dead converse, and into these fields a mortal may venture unappalled. What king's court can boast such company, — what school of philosophy such wisdom?' Verily if you had ever examined my library you would not imagine I lacked companionship. Why sir, yonder, —

> 'The old, dead authors throng me round about.
> And Elzevir's gray ghosts from leathern graves look out.'

Digitized by Google

Count Oxenstiern spoke truly, when he declared, 'Occupied with the great minds of antiquity, we are no longer annoyed by contemporaneous fools.'"

She rose and pointed to the handsome cases in the rear room, filled with choice volumes; and, while she stood with one arm resting on the easel, Dr. Grey looked searchingly at her.

To-day there was a *spirituelle* beauty in the white face that he had never seen before; and the large eloquent eyes were full of dreamy sunset radiance, unlike their wonted steely glitter. A change, vague and indefinable, but unmistakable, had certainly passed over that countenance since its owner came to reside at "Solitude," and, instead of marring, had heightened its loveliness. The features were thinner, the cheeks had lost something of their pure oval moulding, and the delicate nostrils were almost transparent in their waxen curves; but the arch of the lip was softened and lowered, and the face was like that of some marble goddess on which midsummer moonshine sleeps.

Her white mull robe was edged at the skirt and up the front with a rich border of blue morning-glories, and a blue cord and tassel girded it at her waist, while the broad braids of hair at the back of her head were looped and fastened with a ribbon of the same color. Her sleeves were gathered up to keep them clear of the paint on the palette, and the dimples were no longer visible in her arms. The ivory flesh was shrinking closer to the small bones, and the diaphanous hands were so thin that the sapphire asp glided almost off the slender finger around which it was coiled.

"Mrs. Gerome, you have lost twenty pounds of flesh within the last two months, and your extreme pallor alarms me."

"All things look pallid in these rooms, for the light is bluish, reflected from carpet, furniture, and curtains."

"I have noticed that you invariably wear blue, to the exclusion of all other colors."

"Yes. Throughout the Levant it is considered a mortuary color; and, moreover, I like its symbolism. The *Mater dolorosa* often wears blue vestments; also the priests during Lent; and even the images of Christ are veiled in blue, as holy week ap-

Digitized by Google

proaches. Azure, in its absolute significance, represents truth, and is the symbol of the soul after death; so, as I walk the earth, — a fleshy 'death in life,' — I clothe myself symbolically. In pagan cosmogonies the Creator is always colored blue Jupiter Ammon, Vischnou, Cneph, Krischna, — all are azure. And because it is a solemn, consecrated color, mystic and mournful, I wear it."

"My dear madam, this is a morbid whimsicality that trenches closely upon monomania, and would be more tolerable in a lackadaisical school-girl, than in a mature, intelligent, and gifted woman. Some of your fantasies would be positively respectable in a Bedlamite, and you seem an anomalous compound of eccentricities peculiar to extreme youth and to advanced age."

"I believe, sir, that you are entirely correct in your analysis. I stand before you, young in years, but forsaken by that 'blue-eyed Hope' who frolics hand in hand with youth; and yet, utterly devoid of that philosophy and wisdom which justly belong to the old age of my heart."

Her tone was indescribably weary, and, as she laid aside her brush and folded her hands together on the cross-beam of the easel, the transient light died out of her countenance, and the worn, tired look, came back and settled on every feature.

> . . . "The soft, sad eyes,
> Set like twilight planets in the rainy skies,—
> With the brow all patience, and the lips all pain,"—

wove a strange spell over the visitor, whose gaze was riveted on the only woman who had ever aroused even temporary interest in his heart.

She was always beautiful, but to-day there was a helpless, hopeless abandonment in her listless demeanor, that appealed successfully to the manly tenderness and chivalry of his nature; and into his strong, true, noble soul, came a longing to cheer, and guide, and redeem this strange, desolate woman, whose personal loveliness would have made her regnant over the gay circles of fashionable life, yet whose existence was more lonely than that of an eaglet in some mountain eyrie.

Digitized by Google

Rising, he leaned against the easel and looked down into the colorless face that possessed such a wondrous charm for him.

"Mrs. Gerome, for natures diseased like yours, the only remedy, the only cure, is earnest, vigorous labor; and the regimen you really require is mournfully at variance with your present habits and modes of thought."

"I do labor incessantly; more indefatigably than any plough man, or mason, or carpenter. Your prescription has been thoroughly tested, and found worthless, as an antidote to my malady,—hopelessness."

"Unfortunately the labor has all been mental; heart and soul have stood aloof, while the brain almost wore itself out. This canvas is destroying you; your creations are too rapid, too exhausting."

"Dr. Grey, you grievously misapprehend the whole matter, for my work reminds me of what Canova once said of West's pictures, 'He groups; he does not compose.'"

Dr. Grey put his hand on her wrist, and counted the rapid, feeble, irregular pulse.

She made an effort to throw off his fingers, but they clung tenaciously to the polished arm.

"How many hours do you sleep, during the twenty-four?"

"Sometimes three, occasionally one, frequently none."

"How much longer do you suppose your constitution will endure such merciless taxation?"

"I know very little about these things, and care still less, but as Horne Tooke said, when a foreigner inquired how much treason an Englishman might venture to write without being hanged, 'I can not inform you just yet, but I am trying.'"

"Has life become such an intolerable burden that you are impatient to shake it off?"

"Even so, Dr. Grey. When Elsie dies the last link will have snapped, and I trust I shall not long survive her. If I prayed at all, it would be for speedy death."

"If you prayed at all, existence would not prove so wearisome; for resignation would cure half your woes."

"Confine your prescriptions to the body,—that is tangible,

Digitized by Google

and may be handled and scrutinized; but venture no nostrums for a heart and soul of which you know nothing. Once I was almost a Moslem in the frequency and fervor of my prayers; but now, the only petition I could force myself to offer would be that prayer of Epictetus, '*Lead me, Zeus and Destiny, whithersoever I am appointed to go; I will follow without wavering; even though I turn coward and shrink, I shall have to follow, all the same.*'"

Dr. Grey sighed heavily, and answered,—

"It is painful to hear from feminine lips a fatalism so grim as to make all prayer a mockery; and it would seem that the loss of those dear to you, would have insensibly and unavoidably drawn your heart heavenward, in search of its transplanted idols."

He knew from the sudden spasm that seized her calm features, and shuddered through her tall figure, that he had touched, perhaps too rudely, some chord in her nature which—

> "Made the coiled memory numb and cold,
> That slept in her heart like a dreaming snake,
> Drowsily lift itself, fold by fold,
> And gnaw, and gnaw hungrily, half-awake."

"Ah, indeed, my heart was drawn after them,—but not heavenward! No, no, no! My idols were not transplanted,—they were shattered!—shattered!"

She leaned forward, looking up into his face; and, raising her hand impressively, she continued in a voice so mournful, so hopelessly bitter, that Dr. Grey shivered as he listened.

"Oh, sir, you who stand gazing down in sorrowful reproach upon what you regard as my unpardonable impiety, little dream of the fiery ordeal that consumed my childlike, beautiful faith, as flames crisp and blacken chaff. I am alone, and must ever be, while in the flesh; and I hoard my pain, sparing the world my moans and tears, my wry faces and desperate struggles. I tell you, Dr. Grey,—

Digitized by Google

'None know the choice I made; I make it still.
None know the choice I made, and broke my heart,
Breaking mine idol; I have braced my will
Once, chosen for once my part.
I broke it at a blow, I laid it cold,
Crushed in my deep heart where it used to live.
My heart dies inch by inch; the time grows old,
Grows old in which I grieve.'"

He did not comprehend her, but felt that her past must have been melancholy indeed, of which the bare memory was so torturing.

"At least, Mrs. Gerome, let us thank God, that beyond the grave there remains an eternal reunion with your idol, and—"

"God forbid! You talk at random, and your suggestion would drive me mad, if I believed it. Let me be quiet."

She walked away, and seemed intently watching the sea, of whose protean face she never wearied; and, puzzled and tantalized, Dr. Grey turned to examine the unfinished picture.

It represented an almost colossal woman, kneeling under an apple-tree, with her folded hands lifted towards a setting sun that glared from purple hills, across waving fields of green and golden grain. The azure mantle that enveloped the rounded form, floated on the wind and seemed to melt in air, so dim were its graceful outlines; and on one shoulder perched a dove with head under its wing, nestling to sleep,—while a rabbit nibbled the grass at her feet, and a squirrel curled himself comfortably on the border of her robe. In the foreground were scattered sheaves of yellow wheat, full ears of corn, bunches of blue, bloom-covered grapes, clusters of olives, and various delicate flowers whose brilliant hues seemed drippings from some wrung and broken rainbow.

The face was unlike flesh and blood,—was dim, elfish, wan, with large, mild eyes, as blue and misty as the *nebulæ* that Herschel found in Southern skies,—eyes that looked at nothing, but seemed to penetrate the universe and shed soft solemn light over all things. Back from the broad, low brow, floated a cloud of silky yellow hair, that glittered in the slanting rays of sunshine as if powdered with gold dust; and over its streaming

Digitized by Google

strands fluttered two mottled butterflies, and a honey-laden bee. On distant hill-slopes cattle browsed, and at the right of the kneeling woman a young lamb nibbled a cluster of snowy lilies, while a dappled fawn watched the gambols of a dun kid; and on the left, in a tuft of bearded grass, a brown snake arched its neck to peer at a brood of half-fledged partridges.

"Mrs. Gerome, will you be so kind as to explain this mythologic design?"

She came back to the easel, and took up her palette.

"If it requires an explanation it is an egregious failure, and shall find a vacant corner in some rubbish garret."

"It is exceedingly beautiful, but I do not fully comprehend the symbolism."

"If it does not clearly mean the one thing for which it was intended, it means nothing, and is worthless. Look, sir, she —

> 'Forgets, remembers, grieves, and is not sad;
> The quiet lands and skies leave light upon her eyes;
> None knows her weak, or wise, or tired, or glad.'"

Dr. Grey bit his lip, but shook his head.

"You must read me your painted riddle more explicitly. Is it Ceres?"

"No, sir; a few sheaves do not make a harvest. I am a stupid bungler, spoiling canvas and wasting paint, or else you are as obtuse as the critics who may one day hover hungrily over it. Try the aid of one more clew, and if you fail to catch my purpose, I will dash my brush all loaded with ochre, right into those mystic, prescient eyes, and blur them forever. Listen, and guess, —

> 'This is my lady's praise;
> God after many days
> Wrought her in unknown ways,
> In sunset lands;
> This was my lady's birth,
> God gave her might and mirth
> And laid his whole sweet earth
> Between her hands.'"

"Pray do not visit the sin of my stupidity upon that fascinating picture. I am not familiar with the lines you quote, but

Digitized by Google

know that you have represented Nature, have embodied an ideal Isis, or Hertha, or Cybele; though I can not positively name the phase of the Universal Mother, which you have seized and perpetuated."

He caught her arm, and removed from her fingers the palette and brushes.

"Dr. Grey, it is more than either or all of the three you mention; for Persian mythology, like Persian wines and Persian roses, is richer, more subtle, more fragrant, more glowing than any other. That woman is '*Espendérmad.*'"

"Thank you; now I comprehend the whole. God has endowed you with wonderful talent. The fruit and flowers in that foreground must have cost you much labor, for indeed you seem to have faithfully followed the injunction of Titian, 'Study the effect of light and shade on a bunch of grapes.' That luscious amber cluster lying near the poppies is tantalizingly suggestive of Rhineland, and of the vines that garland the hills of Crete and Cyprus."

A shade of annoyance and disappointment crossed the artist's face.

"Now, I quite realize what Cespedes felt, when, finding that visitors were absorbed by the admirable finish of some jars and vases in the foreground of the 'Last Supper,' upon which he had expended so much time and thought, he called his servant and exclaimed in great chagrin, 'Andres, rub me out these things, since, after all my care and study, people choose to see nothing but these impertinences.'"

"If Zeuxis' grandest triumph consisted in painting grapes, you assuredly should not take umbrage at my praise of that fruit on your canvas, which hints of Tokay and Lachrima Christi. I am not an artist, but I have studied the best pictures in Europe and America, and you must acquit me of any desire to flatter when I tell you that background yonder is one of the most extraordinary successes I have ever seen, from either amateur or professional painters."

Mrs. Gerome arched her black brows slightly, and replied,—

"Then the success was accidental, and I stumbled upon it,

Digitized by Google

for I bestow little study on the backgrounds of my work. They are mere dim distances of bluish haze, and do not interest me, and, since I paint for amusement, I give most thought to my central figure."

"Have you forgotten the anecdote of Rubens, who, when offered a pupil with the recommendation that he was sufficiently advanced in his studies to assist him at once in his backgrounds, laughed, and answered, 'If the youth was capable of painting backgrounds he did not need his instruction; because the regulation and management of them required the most comprehensive knowledge of the art.'"

"Yes, I am aware that is one of the *dogmata* of the craft, but Rubens was no more infallible than you or I, and his pictures give me less pleasure than those of any other artist of equal celebrity. Dr. Grey, if I am even a tolerable judge of my own work, the best thing I have yet achieved is the drapery of that form. Perhaps I am inclined to plume myself upon this point, from the fact that it was the opinion of Carlo Maratti that 'The arrangement of drapery is more difficult than drawing the human figure; because the right effect depends more upon the taste of the artist than upon any given rules.' That sweep of blue gauze has cost me more toil than everything else on the canvas."

"Pardon the expression of my curiosity concerning your modes of composition in these singular and quaint creations, for which you have no models; and tell me how this ideal presented itself to your imagination."

"Dr. Grey, I am not a great genius like Goethe, and unfortunately can not candidly echo his declaration, that, 'Nothing ever came to me in my sleep.' I can scarcely tell you when this idea was first born in my busy, tireless brain, but it took form one evening after I had read Charlotte Brontë's 'Woman Titan,' in 'Shirley,' and compared it with that glowing description of Jean Paul Richter, 'And so the Sun stands at the border of the Earth, and looks back on his stately Spring, whose robe-folds are valleys, whose breast-bouquet is gardens, whose blush is a vernal evening, and who, when she rises, will be Summer.'

Digitized by Google

Still it was vague, and eluded me, until I found somewhere in my most desultory reading, an account of '*Espendermad*,' one of the six angels of Ormuzd, to whom was entrusted the guardianship of the earth. That night I dreamed that I stood under a vine at Schiraz, gathering golden-tinted grapes, when a voice arrested me, and, looking over my shoulder, I saw that face peeping at me across a hedge of crimson roses. Next day I sketched the features as they had appeared in my dream, but I was not fully satisfied, and waited and pondered. Finally, I read 'Madonna Mia,' and then all was as you see it now, startlingly distinct and palpable."

"Why did you not select some dusky-haired, dusky-eyed, olive-tinted oriental type, instead of a blonde who might safely venture into Valhalla as a genuine Celtic Iduna?"

"With the exception of the yellow locks, I suspect the face of my '*Espendermad*' might easily be matched among the maidens of the Caucasus, who furnish the most perfect types of Circassian beauty. You know there is a tradition that when Leonardo da Vinci chanced to meet a man with an expression of character that he wished to make use of in his work, he followed him until he was able to delineate the face on canvas; but, on the contrary, the countenances I paint present themselves to my imagination, and pursue me inexorably until I put them into pigment. I do not possess ideals,—they seize and possess me, teasing me for form and color, and forcing me to object them on canvas. Such is the *modus operandi* of whims that give me my '*Espendermad*' praying to the Sun for benisons on the Earth, which she is appointed to guard. Ah, if like the lambkins and birds, I, too, could creep to the starry border of her azure robe, and lay my weary head down and find repose Some day, if my mind ever grows calm enough, I want to paint a picture of Rest, that I can hang on my wall and look upon when I am worn out in body and soul, when, indeed,—

'My feet are wearied, and my hands are tired,
My heart oppressed,
And I desire, what I long desired,
Rest,—only Rest.'"

Digitized by Google

"My dear madam, unless you speedily change your present mode of life, you will not paint that contemplated picture, for a long rest will soon overtake you."

A gleam that was nearer akin to joy than any expression he had yet seen, passed from eye to lip, and she answered, almost eagerly, —

"If that be true, it offers a premium for the continuance of habits you condemn so strenuously; but I dare not hope it, and I beg of you not to tantalize me with vain expectations of a release that may yet be far, far distant."

Dr. Grey's heart stirred with earnest sympathy for this lonely hopeless soul, who, standing almost upon the threshold of life, stretched her arms so yearningly to woo the advance of death.

The room was slowly filling with shadows, and, leaning there against her easel, she looked as unearthly as the pearly forms that summer clouds sometimes assume, when a harvest-moon springs up from sea foam and fog, and stares at them. When she spoke again, her voice was chill and crisp.

"My malady is beyond your reach, and baffles human skill. You mean only kindness, and I suppose I ought to thank you, but alas! the sentiment of gratitude is such a stranger in my heart, that it has yet to learn an adequate language. Dr. Grey, the only help you can possibly render me is to prolong Elsie's life. As for me, and my uncertain future, give yourself no charitable solicitude. Do you recollect what Lessing wrote to Claudius? 'I am too proud to own that I am unhappy. I shut my teeth, and let the bark drift. Enough that I do not turn it over with my own hands.' Elsie is signalling for me. Do you hear that bell? Good-night, Dr. Grey."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I HAVE had a long conversation with Ulpian, and find him violently opposed to the scheme you mentioned to me several days since. He declares he will gladly share his last dollar with you sooner than see you embark in a career so fraught with difficulties, trials, and—"

Miss Jane paused to find an appropriate word, and Salome very promptly supplied her.

"Temptations. That is exactly what you both mean. Go on."

"Well, yes, dear. I am afraid the profession you have selected is beset with dangerous allurements for one so inexperienced and unsophisticated as yourself."

"Bah! Speak out. I am sick of circumlocution. What do you understand by unsophisticated?"

"Why, I mean,—well, what can I mean but just what the word expresses,—unsophisticated? That is, young, thoughtless, ignorant of the ways of the world, and the excessive cunning and deceit of human nature."

"Begging your pardon, it has another significance, which you will find if you look into your dictionary,—that blessed Magna Charta of linguistic rights and privileges. I do not claim the prerogatives of Ruskin's class of the 'well educated, who are learned in the peerage of words; know the words of true descent and ancient blood at a glance, from words of modern *canaille*;' but I venture the assertion that I am sufficiently sophisticated to plunge into the vortex of public life, and yet keep my head above water."

"I don't want to see my little girl an actress, or a *prima donna*, bold, forward, and eager to face a noisy, clamorous crowd, who feel privileged to say just what they please about her. It would break my heart; and, if you are bent on such a step, I hope you will wait, at least, till I am dead."

"You ought to be willing to see me do anything honest, that will secure my dependent brother and sister from want."

Digitized by Google

"The necessity of laboring for them is not especially imperative at this juncture, and why should you be more sensitive now than formerly? Do not deceive yourself, dear child, but face the truth, no matter how ugly it may possibly be. It is not a sense of duty to the younger children, but an inflated vanity, that prompts you to parade your beauty and your wonderful voice on the stage, where they will elicit applause and flattering adulation. My little girl, that is the most dangerous, the most unhealthy atmosphere, a woman can possibly breathe."

"Pray tell me how you learned all this? You, who have spent your life in this quiet old house, who have been almost as secluded as some Cambrian Culdee, can really know nothing of that public life you condemn so bitterly."

"The history of those who have walked in the path you are now preparing to follow, proves the deleterious influences and ruinous associations that surround that class of women."

"Jenny Lind and Sarah Siddons redeem any class, no matter how much maligned."

"But what assurance have I, that, unlike the ninety-nine, you will resemble the one-hundredth?"

"Only try me, Miss Jane."

"Ah, child! A rash boy said the same thing when he tried to drive the sun, and not only consumed himself but nearly burned up the world. There is rather too much at stake to warrant such reckless experiments."

"Quit mythology, — it is not in your line, — and come back to stern facts and serious realities. Because I wish to dance a quadrille or cotillion, and acquit myself creditably, does it ensue as an inexorable consequence, that I shall join some strolling ballet troupe, and out-Bayadère the Bayadères?"

"That depends altogether upon your agility and grace. If you could reasonably hope to rival your Hebrew namesake, I am afraid my little girl would think it 'her duty' to dance instead of to sing, for the acquisition of a fortune; and insist upon executing wonderful things with her heels and toes, instead of her voice."

"You and Dr. Grey seem to have simultaneously arrived at

Digitized by Google

the charitable conclusion that my heart is pretty much in the same condition that the Hebrew temple was, when Christ undertook to drive out the profane. Thongs in hand you two have overturned my motives, and, by a very summary court-martial, condemned them to be scourged out. Now, mark you, I am neither making change nor selling doves, and still less are you and your brother — Jesus. Dr. Grey does me the honor to indulge a chronic skepticism concerning the possibility of any good and unselfish impulse in my nature, and I am sorry to see that you have caught the contagious doubt of me, and of my motives."

She began the sentence in a challenging, sneering voice, but it was ended in a lower and faltering tone.

"While in the light of her large angry eyes,
Uprose and rose a slow imperious sorrow."

"My dear, don't attempt to whip Ulpian over my shoulders. You know very well that I have invested in you an amount of faith that the united censure of the world cannot shake; and if Ulpian does not follow my example, whose fault is it, I should be glad to know? Evidently not his, — certainly not mine, — but undoubtedly yours. I have noticed that you took extraordinary care and a very peculiar pleasure in making him believe you much worse in all respects than you really are; and since you have labored so industriously to lower yourself in his estimation, it would be a poor compliment to your skill and energy if I told you that you had not entirely succeeded in your rather remarkable aim. Before he came home you were as contented, and amiable, and happy, as my old cat there on the rug; but Ulpian's appearance affected you as the entrance of a dog does my maltese, who arches her back, and growls, and claws, as long as he is in sight. I am truly sorry you two could never agree, but I feel bound to tell you that you have only yourself to blame. I do not claim that my sailor-boy is a saint, but he is assuredly some inches nearer sanctification than my poor little Salome. Don't you think so? Be honest, dear"

Digitized by Google

Miss Jane's hand tenderly caressed the beautiful head; and, as Salome was too sullen or too much mortified to reply, the old lady continued,—

"Nevertheless, Ulpian is a true and devoted friend; and can not bear the thought of your leaving us, for any purpose, much less the one you contemplate. Last night he said, 'Janet, I am her brother, and think you I shall allow my sister to go out from the sacred precincts of home, and become a target for the envy and malice of the better classes who will criticise her, and for the coarse plaudits of the pit? Do you suppose I can willingly see her bare feet turned towards a path paved with glowing ploughshares? Tell her, for me, that if ever she should carry her unfortunate freak into execution, I shall never wish to touch her hand again, for I shall feel that it has lost its purity in the clasp of many to whom she can not refuse it during a professional career.'"

The orphan lifted her head from the arm of Miss Jane's chair, where it had rested for some minutes, and striking her palms forcibly together, she exclaimed, proudly,—

"Tell Dr. Grey I humbly thank him, but the threat has lost its sting; and if I should chance to meet him years hence, though my hands shall be pure and clean as Una's, and as unsullied as his own,—so help me heaven! I will never thrust my touch on his, nor so far forget myself as to suffer his fingers to approach mine. When I pass from this threshold, we will have shaken hands forever."

"Dr. Grey's ears are not proof against such elevated, ringing tones of voice, and he could not avoid hearing, as he came up the steps, the childish words which he assures you he has no intention of believing or remembering."

He had tapped twice at the half-open door, and now came forward with a firm, quick step, to the ottoman where Salome sat. Taking her hands, he patted the palms softly against each other, and smiling good-humoredly, continued,—

"They are very white, and shapely, and pure, and I am not afraid that my little sister will soil them. Her brother looks forward to the day when they will gently and gracefully help

Digitized by Google

nim in his work among God's suffering poor. I have not forgotten how dexterous and docile I found your fingers, when I had temporarily lost the use of my own, and I shall not fail to levy contributions of labor in the coming years."

She had snatched her fingers from his, and no sooner had he ceased speaking, than she bowed haughtily, and answered, —

"Our reconciliations all belong to the Norman family, and are quite as lasting as Lamourette's. Ceaseless war is preferable to a violated truce, and since I have not swerved from my purpose, I shall not falter in its enunciation. If I live it shall not be my fault if I fail to go upon the stage. I am not so fastidious as Dr. Grey, and one who sprang from *canaille* must be pardoned if she betrays a longing for the 'flesh-pots of Egypt.'"

She would have given her right hand to recall her words, — when, a moment later, she met the gaze of profound pity and disappointment with which Dr. Grey's eyes dwelt upon her countenance, hardened now by its expression of insolent haughtiness; but he allowed her no opportunity for retraction, even had she mastered her overweening pride, and stooping to whisper a brief sentence in his sister's ear, he took a medical book from the table, and left the room.

The silence that ensued seemed interminable to Salome, and at last she turned, bowed her head in Miss Jane's lap, and muttered through set teeth, —

"You see it is best that I should go. Even you must be weary of this strife."

The old lady's trembling hands were laid lovingly on the girl's hot brow and scorched cheeks.

"Not half so weary as your own oppressed heart. My dear child, why do you persist in tormenting yourself so unmercifully? Why will you say things that you do not mean? — that are absolute libels on your actual feelings? I have often seen and deplored affectations of generosity and refinement, but you are the first person I ever met who delighted in a pretence of meanness, which her genuine nature abhorred. Salome, I have tried to prove myself a mother to you since the day that I took you under my roof; and now, when I am passing away from the

Digitized by Google

world, — when a few short months will probably end my feeble life, I think you owe it to me to give me no sorrow that your hands can easily ward off. Don't leave me. When I am gone there will be time and to spare, for all your schemes. Stay here, and let me have peace and sunshine about me, in my last fading hours. Ah, dear, you can't be cruel to the old woman who has long loved you so tenderly."

The orphan pressed the withered hands to her lips, and, covering her face with the folds of Miss Jane's black silk apron, exclaimed passionately, —

"Do not think me ungrateful, — do not think me insensible to your love and kindness; but, indeed I am very miserable here. Oh, Miss Jane! if you knew how I have suffered, you would not chide, you would only pity and sympathize with me; for your heart will never steel itself against your poor wretched Salome!"

She lost control of herself, and sobbed violently.

"My dear little girl, tell me all your sorrows. To whom can you reveal your trials and griefs, if not to me? For some weeks past I have observed that you shunned my gaze, and seemed restless when I endeavored to discover how you were employing your time; and I have realized that you were sorely distressed, but I disliked to force your confidence, or appear suspicious. Now, I have a right to ask what makes you miserable in my house? Is the little girl ashamed to show me her heart?"

"One month since, I would have gone to the stake rather than have shown it to you, or have had any one dream of the wretchedness locked in its chambers; but a week ago I was overwhelmed with humiliation, and now I am not ashamed to tell you. Now that Dr. Grey knows it, I would not care if the whole world were hissing and jeering at my heels, and shouting my shame with a thousand trumpets. I tried to keep it from him, and failing, the world is welcome to roll it as a sweet morsel under its busy, stinging, slanderous tongue. Miss Jane, I have intended to be sincere in every respect, but it appears that, after all, I have proved only an arrant hypocrite if you

Digitized by Google

believe that I dislike your brother. I want to go away, because I can no longer endure to live in the same house with Dr. Grey, who shows me more plainly every hour that he can never return the affection I have been idiotic and presumptuous enough to cherish for him. There! I have said it, — and my lips are not blistered by the unwomanly confession, and you still permit my head to rest in your lap. I expected you would be indignant and insulted, and gladly send such a lunatic from your family circle, — or that you would dismiss me coolly, with lofty contempt; but only a woman can properly pity a woman's weakness, and you are crying over me. Ah! if your tears were falling on my grave, instead of my face!"

Miss Jane was weeping bitterly, but now and then she stooped and kissed the quivering lips of her unhappy charge, who found some balm in the earnest sympathy with which her appeal was received.

"My precious child, why should you be ashamed of your love for the noblest man who ever unconsciously became a woman's idol? I do not much wonder at your feelings, because you have seen no one else in any respect comparable to him, and it is difficult for you to realize the disparity in your ages. Poor thing! It must be terrible, indeed, to one who loves him as you do, to have no hope of possessing his affection in return. But I suppose it can't be helped, — and one half the world seem to pour out their love on the wrong persons, and find misery where they should have only joy and peace. Thank God, all this mischief is shut out of heaven! Dear, don't hide your face, as if you had stolen half of my sheep; whereas my poor innocent sailor-boy has unintentionally stolen my little girl's heart."

"Miss Jane, you are too good, — too kind. Do not help me to excuse myself, — do not teach me to palliate my pitiable weakness. It is a grievous, a shameful, a disgraceful thing, for a woman to allow herself to love any man who gives her no evidence of affection, and shows her beyond all doubt that he is utterly indifferent to her. This is a sin against womanly pride and delicacy that demands sackcloth and ashes, and penance and long years of humiliation and self-abasement; and I tell you

Digitized by Google

this is the one sin which my proud soul will never pardon in my poor, weak, despised heart."

"If you feel this so keenly, you will soon succeed in conquering and casting out of your heart an affection, which, having nothing to feed upon, will speedily exhaust itself. You are young, and your elastic nature will rebound from the pressure that you now find so painful. My dear, a few months or years will bring comparative oblivion of this period of your life."

"No; they will engrave more deeply the consciousness that I have missed my sole chance of earthly happiness, for Dr. Grey is the only man I shall ever love, — is the only man who can lift me to his own noble height of excellence. I know it is customary to laugh at a girl's protestations of undying devotion, and that the theory of feminine constancy is as entirely effete as the worship of the Cabiri, or the belief in Blokula and its witches; but, unfortunately, the world has not sneered it entirely out of existence, and I am destined to furnish a mournful exemplification of its reality. Whether my nature is unlike that of the majority of women, I shall not undertake to decide; but this I know, — God gave me only so much love to spend, and I poured it all out, I deluged my idol with it, instead of doling it carefully through the future years. Like the woman of Bethany, I have broken my box of alabaster, and spilled all my precious ointment, which might have served for a lifetime of anointing, and I cannot renew the shattered receptacle, nor gather back the wasted fragrance; and so my heart must remain without spikenard or balm during its earthly sojourn. I have been prodigal, — have beggared my womanly nature, — and henceforth shall feast on husks. But this piece of folly can be laid on no shoulders but my own, and I must not wince if they are galled by burdens which only I have imposed. Some women, under similar circumstances, console themselves by fostering a tender and excessive gratitude, which they pet and fondle and call second love; but the feeling belongs to a different species, and is to strong, earnest, genuine love, what the stunted pines of second growth are to the noble, stalwart, unapproachable oaks, that spring from the primitive virgin soil."

Digitized by Google

Miss Jane lifted the bowed face, and rested the head against her bosom.

"If you are so thoroughly convinced of the impossibility of mastering this affection, why talk of going away? You will be happier here, under any circumstances, than among strangers."

"Do not misapprehend me. I do not intend to cherish my weakness, — to caress and pamper it. I mean to strangle, and mangle, and bury it, if possible. I meant, not that I should always love Dr. Grey, but that I should never be able to regard any one else as I once loved him. I can not stay here, seeing him daily trample my alabaster and ointment under his feet. I can not endure the humiliation that has for some days past made this house more intolerable than I may one day find Phlegethon. I want to go into the whirl and din of life, where my thoughts can dwell on some more comforting theme than the peerless preëminence of the man who is master here; where I can spend hours in elaborating *toilettes* and *coiffures* that will show to the greatest advantage my small stock of personal charms; where the admiration and love of other men will at least amuse and soothe the heart that has no more love for anybody, or anything. Miss Jane, if I had never become so deeply attached to Dr. Grey, it might perhaps be unsafe for me to venture into the career which now lies before me; but when a woman's heart is cold and dead in her bosom, there is no peril she need fear; for only her warm, pleading heart, can ever silence the iron clang of conscience and the silvery accents of reason. Worshipping some clay god, my loving, yearning heart, might possibly have led me astray; but now, pride and ambition stand as sentinels over its corpse, and a heartless woman, desirous only of amassing a fortune and making herself a celebrity in musical circles, is as safe from harm as the bones of her grandmother, twenty years buried.

The agony that convulsed the orphan's features, and shivered the smoothness of her usually sweet voice, touched the old lady's sympathy, and she wept silently; straining her imagination for some argument that would make an impression on the adamantine will with which she found her own in conflict.

Digitized by Google

"My child, tell me how long you have had this trouble. When did you first feel an interest in Ulpian?"

Unhesitatingly Salome related all that had occurred in her intercourse with Dr. Grey, and her companion was surprised at the frankness and mercilessness with which she analyzed her own feelings at each stage of the acquaintance that proved so disastrous to her peace of mind; and not only held her weakness up for scorn, but exonerated Dr. Grey from all censure.

The minuteness of the confession was exceedingly painful; and, at its conclusion, she pressed her palms to her cheeks, and moaned, —

"There, Miss Jane, I have not winced; I have kept back nothing. I have been as patient and inexorable in laying open my nature, in treating you to a *post-mortem* examination of my heart, as a dentist in scraping and chiselling a sensitive tooth, or a surgeon in cutting out a cancer that baffled cauterization. Now you know all that I can tell you, and I here lay the past in a sepulchre, and roll the stone upon it, and henceforth I trust you will respect the dead; at least, let silence rest upon its ashes. *Hic jacet cor cordium.*"

Salome extricated herself from the arms of her best friend, and smoothed the hair that constant strokes had somewhat disordered.

"Salome, I can not live much longer."

"I know that, dear Miss Jane, and it pains me even to think of leaving the only person who ever really loved me."

"For my sake, dear child, bear the trial of remaining here a little longer; at least, until I die. Do not desert me in my last hours. I do not want the hands of strangers about me, when I am cold and stiff."

Salome rose and walked several times up and down the room; then paused beside the easy chair, and laid her clasped hands in Miss Jane's.

"You alone have a right to control me. Do with me as you think best. I will not forsake the true, tender friend, who has done more for me than all else on earth, or in heaven. For the present I remain here; but allow me to say that I do not aban-

Digitized by Google

don my scheme. I relinquish none of its details, — I only bide my time."

"'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Thank you, my precious little girl, for yielding to my wishes when they conflict with yours. Some day you will rejoice that you made what seemed a sacrifice of inclination on the altar of duty. Now, listen to me. Ulpian is so enraptured with your voice, that, while he will never consent to this stage-struck madness, he is exceedingly anxious that you should enjoy every musical advantage, and is curious to ascertain to what degree of perfection your voice can be trained. After consulting me, he wrote two days ago to a celebrated professor of music in Philadelphia or New York (I really forget where the man is now residing), and offered him a handsome salary if he would come and teach you for at least six months, or as much longer as he deems requisite. I believe the gentleman is delicate and threatened with consumption, which obliges him to spend the winters in a warm climate, and Ulpian first met him in Italy. My boy thinks that the opinion of this Professor Von Somebody is oracular in musical matters; and, as he has trained some of the best singers in Europe, Ulpian wishes him to have charge of your voice. Say nothing about it until we hear whether he can accept our offer. Kiss me."

Salome's face crimsoned, and she said, hesitatingly, —

"Miss Jane, I can not consent that Dr. Grey should contribute one cent toward my musical tuition. I can humbly and gratefully accept your charitable aid, but not his. You love me, and therefore your bounty is not oppressive or humiliating, but he only pities and tolerates me, and I would starve in some gutter rather than live as the recipient of his charity. If you can conveniently spare the money necessary to give me additional cultivation, I shall thankfully receive it, for Barilli has taught me all of which he is master, and there is no one else in town in whom I have more confidence. It was my desire and determination that the work of my hands should pay for polishing my voice, but embroidery-fees would not suffice to defray the expenses of the professor to whom you allude; and, if Dr. Grey

Digitized by Google

pays for his services, I must in advance assure you and him that I shall decline them, and rely upon Barilli and myself."

"Pooh! pooh! It is poor philosophy to quarrel with your bread and butter, no matter who happens to hand it to you. Don't be so savage on Ulpian, who really cares more for you than you deserve. But if it comforts your proud, fierce spirit, you are welcome to know that I — Jane Grey — pay Professor Von — whatever his name may be; and Ulpian's pocket, about which you seem so fastidious, will not be damaged one dollar by the transaction. Are you satisfied, — you pretty piece of beggarly pride?"

"I am more grateful to you, dear Miss Jane, than I shall ever be able to express. God only knows what would have become of me if you had not mercifully snatched me, soul and body, from the purlieus of ruin."

She stooped to receive the fond kiss of her benefactress, and went into her own room.

Nearly an hour later she slowly descended the stairs, and took her hat from the stand in the hall. As she adjusted it on her head, and tied the ribbons behind her knot of hair, Mr. Granville came out of the parlor and seized her hand.

"Why will you torment me so cruelly? I have been waiting and watching for you, at least half an hour."

She haughtily took her fingers from his, and indignantly drew herself up, —

"Mr. Granville presumes on his position as guest, to intrude upon some who do not desire his society. I was not aware, sir, that I had any engagement with you."

"Forgive me, Salome! How have I offended you? If you could realize how much pleasure your presence affords me, you would not punish me by absenting yourself as you have persistently done for three days past."

He bent his handsome face closer to hers, looking appealingly into her beautiful flashing eyes; but she put up her hands to push him aside, and answered, —

"I shall be happy to entertain you in the evenings, when the remainder of the household assemble in the parlor; and will,

Digitized by Google

with great pleasure, sing for you whenever Miss Muriel will kindly oblige me by playing my accompaniments; but I prefer to confine our acquaintance to such occasions."

"Will you not allow me the privilege of accompanying you in the walk for which you seem prepared?"

"No, sir; I respectfully decline your attendance."

She saw his cheek flush, and he said, hastily,—

"Salome, I shall begin to hope that you fear to trust your own heart."

"Do not forget yourself, sir. If you knew where my heart is housed, you would spare yourself the fruitless trouble, and me the annoyance, of attentions and expressions of admiration which I avail myself of this opportunity to assure you are particularly disagreeable to me. I wish to treat you courteously, as the guest of those under whose roof I am permitted to reside, but 'thus far, and no farther,' must you venture. Moreover, Mr. Granville, since we are merely comparative strangers, I should be gratified if you will in future do me the honor to recollect that it is one of my peculiarities,—one of my idiosyncrasies,—to prefer that only those I respect and love should call me Salome. Good afternoon, sir."

She took her music-book, bowed coolly, and made her exit through the front door, which she closed after her.

In the hammock that was suspended on the eastern side of the piazza, Dr. Grey had thrown himself to rest; and meanwhile, to search for some surgical operation recorded in one of his books.

Just behind him a window opened from the hall, and to-day, though a rose-colored shade was lowered, the sash had been raised, and every word that was uttered in the passage floated distinctly to him.

The whole conversation occurred so rapidly that he had no opportunity of discovering his presence to the persons within, and though he cleared his throat and coughed rather spasmodically, his warning was unheeded by those for whom it was intended.

He knew that Salome could not possibly have guessed his

Digitized by Google

proximity, as he was not accustomed to use this hammock, and was completely shielded from observation; and, while pained and surprised by Mr. Granville's dishonorable course, which threatened life-long wretchedness for poor Muriel, Dr. Grey's heart throbbed with joy at the assurance that Salome was not so ungenerous as he had feared. Probably no other human being would have so highly appreciated her conduct on this occasion; and, as he mused, with his thumb and fore-finger thrust between the leaves of the book, a glad smile broke over his grave face.

"God bless the girl! Her prayers and mine have not been in vain, and she is putting under her feet the baser impulses that mar her character. Granville is considered by the world exceedingly handsome and agreeable, and many,—yes, the majority of women, would have yielded, and indulged in a 'harmless flirtation,' where Salome stood firm. There was something akin to the scornful ring of Rachel's voice in that child's tones, when she told Gerard he presumed on his position as guest; and I will wager my hand that her large eyes did not exactly resemble a dove's when she informed him it was not his privilege to call her Salome. She has a fierce, imperious, passionate temper, that goads her into mischief; but, after all, she is—she must be—nobler than I have sometimes thought her. God grant it! God bless her!"

"But blame us women not,—if some appear
Too cold at times; and some too gay and light.
Some griefs gr aw deep. Some woes are hard to bear.
Who knows the Past? And who can judge us right?"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX.

"DOCTOR GREY, are you awake? Dr. Grey, here is a note from 'Solitude,' and the messenger begs that you will lose no time, as one of the servants is supposed to be dying."

Salome had knocked twice at Dr. Grey's door, without arousing him, and the third time she beat a tattoo that would have broken even heavier slumbers than his.

"I am awake, and will strike a light in a moment."

She heard him stumbling about the room, and finally there was a crash, as of a broken vase or goblet.

"What is the matter? Can't you find your matches?"

"No; some one has removed the box from its usual place, and I am fumbling about at random, and smashing things indiscriminately Will you be so good as to bring me a match?"

"I have a candle in my hand, which you can take, while I order Elbert to get your buggy ready."

"Thank you, Salome."

She placed the candle on the mat before his door, laid the note beside it, and went down to the servants' rooms to call the driver.

It was two o'clock, and Dr. Grey had come home only an hour before, from a patient who resided at some distance.

Dressing himself as expeditiously as possible, he read the blurred and crumpled note.

"Dr. Grey: For God's sake come as quick as possible. I am afraid my mother is dying.

"ROBERT MACLEAN."

Three days before, when he visited Elsie, he found her more composed and comfortable than she had been for several weeks, and Mrs. Gerome had seemed almost cheerful, as she sat beside the bed, crimping the borders of the invalid's muslin caps, which the laundress had sent in, stiff and spotless.

Digitized by Google

Recollecting Elsie's desire to confide something to him before her death, and dreading the effect which this sudden termination of her life might have upon her mistress, in whom he was daily becoming more deeply interested, Dr. Grey hurried down stairs and met the orphan.

"Elbert is not quite ready, but will be at the door directly. I told him the case was urgent."

"You are very considerate, Salome, and I am much obliged for your thoughtfulness; though I regret that the messenger waked you, instead of Rachel or me. I have never before known Rachel fail to hear the bell, and I was so weary that I think a ten-inch columbiad would scarcely have aroused me."

"I was not asleep, — was sitting at my window; and hearing some one slam the gate and gallop up the avenue, I went to the door and opened it, to prevent the ringing of the bell and waking of the entire household."

"You should have been asleep four hours ago, and I had no idea you were still up, when I came home. There was no light in your room. Are you quite well?"

"Thank you, I am quite well."

She was dressed as he had seen her at dinner, and now, as she stood resting one hand on the balustrade of the stairway, he thought she looked paler and more weary than he had ever observed her.

The scarlet spray of pelargonium had withered from the heat of her head, where it had rested all the evening, and the large creamy Grand Duke jasmine fastened at her throat by a sprig of coral, was drooping and fading, but still exhaled its strong delicious perfume.

"Your appearance contradicts your assertion. Is your wakefulness attributable to any anxiety or trouble which I can remove?"

"No, sir. I hear Elbert opening the gate. Who is sick at 'Solitude'?"

"The servant who was so severely injured many months ago, by a fall from a carriage, has grown suddenly worse."

Salome accompanied him to the front door, in order to lock it

Digitized by Google

after his departure; and, as he descended the steps, he turned and said, in a subdued voice, —

"You have probably heard that Mrs. Gerome is a very peculiar, — indeed, a decidedly eccentric person?"

"Yes, sir; it is reported that she is almost a lunatic."

"Which is totally false. She is very sensitive, and shrink from strangers, and consequently has no friends here. If I should find Elsie dying, or if I need you, I wish you to come promptly. It may be necessary to have some one beside the household, and you are the only person I can trust. Try to go to sleep immediately, for I may send for you very early in the morning."

"I shall be ready to come when I am needed."

The buggy rolled up to the steps, and Dr. Grey sprang into it and drove swiftly down the avenue.

Salome crept softly back up stairs, but Miss Jane called out, —

"Who is there, in the hall? What is the matter?"

The girl opened the door, and put her head inside.

"Dr. Grey has been called to see a sick woman at 'Solitude,' and I have just locked the door after him."

"Why could not Rachel do that, and save you from coming down stairs? What time of night is it?"

"About half-past two. Rachel is asleep. Good-night."

"'Solitude,' did you say?"

"Yes, madam."

"Well, if people will persist in burrowing in that unlucky den, they must take the consequences. Ulpian, poor fellow, will be completely worn out. Good-night, dear; don't get up to breakfast, if you feel sleepy."

Salome went to her own room, changed her dress, laid gloves, hat, and shawl in readiness upon the bed, and threw herself down on the lounge to rest, and if possible to sleep.

When Dr. Grey reached "Solitude," he found Robert Maclean pacing the paved walk that led to the gate.

"Oh, doctor! Have you come at last? It seems to me I could have crawled twice to your house, since Jerry came back."

Digitized by Google

"What change has taken place in your mother's condition? She was better than usual, when I saw her last."

"We thought she was getting along very well, till all of a sudden she became speechless. Go in, sir; don't stop to knock."

Mrs. Gerome sat at the bedside, mechanically chafing one of the hands that lay on the coverlid, and the face of the dying woman was not more ghastly than the one which bent over her. As Dr. Grey approached, the mistress of the house rose, and put out her hands towards him, with a wistful, pleading, childish manner, that touched him inexpressibly.

"Do not let her die."

He leaned over the pillow, and put his finger on the scarcely palpable pulse.

"Elsie, tell me where or how you suffer."

A ray of recognition leaped up in her sunken eyes, and she looked at him with a yearning, imploring expression, that was pitiable and distressing indeed.

He saw that she was struggling to articulate, but failing in the effort, a groan escaped her, and tears gathered and trickled down her pinched face. He smoothed her contracted forehead, and said, soothingly, —

"Elsie, you feel that I will do all that I can to relieve you. You can not talk to me, but you know me?"

She inclined her head slightly, and in examining her he discovered that only one side was completely paralyzed, and that she could still partially control her left arm. When he had done all that medical skill could suggest, he stood at her side, and she suddenly grasped his fingers.

He put his face close to hers, and observing her tears start afresh, whispered, —

"You wish to tell me something before you die?"

A gurgling sound, and a faint motion of her lips was the only reply of which she was capable.

He placed a pencil between her fingers, but she could not use it intelligibly, and he noticed that her eyes moved from his to

Digitized by Google

those of her mistress, as if to indicate that she was the subject of the desired conversation.

It was distressing to witness her efforts to communicate her wishes, while the tears dripped on her pillow; and unable to endure the sight of her anguish, Mrs. Gerome sank on her knees and hid her face in the coverlid.

Dr Grey gently lifted Elsie's arm and placed her hand on the head of her mistress, and the expression of her face assured him he had correctly interpreted her feelings. Something still disturbed her, and he suggested, —

"Mrs. Gerome, put your hand in hers."

She silently obeyed him, and then the old woman's eyes looked once more intently into his. He could not conjecture her meaning, until, in feeling her pulse, he found that she was trying to touch his fingers with hers.

He slipped his own into the palm where Mrs. Gerome's lay, and, by a last great effort, she pressed them feebly together.

Even then, the touch of those white, soft fingers, thrilled his heart as no other hand had ever done, and he said, —

"Elsie, you mean that you leave her in my care? That you put her in my hands? That you trust her to me?"

It was impossible to mistake the satisfied expression that flashed over her countenance.

"I accept the trust. Elsie, I promise you that while I live she shall never want a true and faithful friend. I will try to take care of her body, and pray for her soul. I will do all that you would have done."

Once more, but very faintly, she pressed the two hands she had clasped, and closed her eyes.

"Oh, doctor, can't you save her?" sobbed Robert.

In the solemn silence that ensued, Mrs. Gerome lifted her face, and Dr. Grey never forgot the wild, imploring gaze, that met his. He understood its import, and shook his head. She rose instantly, moved away from the bed, and left the room.

For nearly an hour Dr. Grey hung over the prostrate form, which lay with closed eyes, and gradually sank into the heavy lethargic sleep, from which he knew she could never awake.

Digitized by Google

Leaving her to the care of Robert and two female servants, he went in search of the mistress of the silent and dreary house.

Taking a lamp from the escritoire in the back parlor, he went from room to room, finding nowhere the object he sought, and at length became alarmed. As he stood in the front door, perplexed and anxious, the thought presented itself that she might have gone down to the beach. He went back to the apartment occupied by the dying woman,—felt once more the sinking pulse, and took a last look at the altered and almost rigid face.

"Robert, I can do her no good. Her soul will very soon be with her God."

"Oh, sir, don't leave her! Don't give her up, while there is life in her body!" cried the son, grasping the doctor's sleeve.

Dr. Grey put his hand on the Scotchman's shoulder, and whispered,—

"I am going to hunt for Mrs. Gerome. She is not in the house. I may be able to render her some service, but your mother is beyond all human aid."

"Is there any pulse?"

"It is so feeble now, I can scarcely count it."

"Please, doctor, stay here by her while she breathes. Don't desert the dear soul. My poor mother!"

Robert lost all control of himself, and wept like a child.

Loth to forsake him in this hour of direst trial, Dr. Grey leaned against the bed, and for some moments watched the irregular convulsive heaving of the woman's chest.

"Oh, sir, if my mistress hadn't a heart of stone, she would have let her die peacefully. She might at least have granted her dying prayer."

"What was it?"

"All of yesterday afternoon she pleaded with her to be baptized. My mother—God bless her dear soul!—my mother told her that she could not consent to die until she saw her baptized; and, with the tears pouring down her poor face, she begged and prayed that I might fetch the minister from town, and that she might see the ceremony performed. But my mo-

Digitized by Google

tress walked up and down the floor, and said, 'Never! never, I have done with mockeries. I have washed my hands of all that,—long, long ago.' And now—it is too late; and my poor mother can never—God be merciful to us! is it all over?"

Dr. Grey raised the head, but the breathing was imperceptible and, after a little while, he softly pressed down the lids that were partially lifted from the glazed eyes, and quitted the room.

His buggy stood at the rear gate, and the driver was asleep, but his master's voice aroused him.

"Elbert, go home, and ask Miss Salome please to come over as soon as you can drive her here."

The east was purple and gold, the sea a purling mass of molten amber, and only two stars were visible low in the west, where a waning moon swung on the edge of the distant misty hills. The air was chill, and a silvery haze hung above the moaning waves, and partially veiled the windings of the beach. Under the trees that clustered so closely around the house, the gloom of night still lingered like a pall, but as Dr. Grey approached the terrace, he felt the pure fresh presence of the new day. Up and down the sands his eyes wandered, hoping to discern a woman's figure, but no living thing was visible, except the flamingo and yellow pheasant still perched where they had spent the night, on the stone balustrade that bordered the terrace. He took off his hat to enjoy the crystalline atmosphere, and while he faced the brightening east, the sharp peculiar bark of the Arab greyhound broke the solemn silence that brooded over sea and land.

The sound proceeded from the boat-house, and he hastened towards it, startling a mimic army of crabs and fiddlers that had not yet ended their nightly marauding. The tide was higher than usual at this early hour, and the waves were breaking sullenly against the stone piers.

As Dr. Grey ascended the iron steps leading to the pavilion, the dog growled and showed his teeth, but the visitor succeeded in partially winning him over, and now passed unmolested into the circular room. A cushioned seat extended around the

Digitized by Google

wall, where windows opened at the four points of the compass; and on the round table in the centre of the marble-tiled floor lay a telescope.

At the eastern window sat Mrs. Gerome, with her head resting on her crossed arms. Although Dr. Grey's steps echoed heavily, as he trod the damp mosaic where the mist had condensed, she gave no evidence of having discovered his presence until he stood close beside her. Then she raised one hand, with a quick gesture of caution and silence. He sat down near her, and watched the countenance that was fully exposed to his scrutiny.

No tears had dimmed the wide, mournful, almost despairing eyes, that gazed with strange intentness over the amber sea, at the golden radiance that heralded the coming sun; and every line and moulding of her delicate features seemed cold and rigid enough for a cenotaph. Even the lips were still and compressed, and a bluish shadow lay about their dimpled corners, and under the heavy jet eyelashes. Her silver comb had become loosened, and was finally dragged down by the coil of hair that slipped slowly until it fell upon the morocco cushion of the seat, and the glistening waves of gray hair rolled around her shoulders, and rippled low on her brow. Sea fog had dampened and sea wind tossed this mass of white locks, till it made a singular burnished frame for the wan face that looked out hopeless and painfully quiet.

Her silk *robe de chambre* of leaden gray, bordered with blue, was unbuttoned at the throat, and showed its faultless curve and contour; while the full, open sleeves, blown back by the strong breeze, bared the snowy arms, where one of the jet serpents that formed her bracelets, pressed so heavily on the white flesh that a purple band was visible when the hand was raised and the bracelet slipped back.

Watching her intently, Dr. Grey could not detect the slightest quiver of nerve or muscle; and she breathed so low and softly that he might have doubted whether she was really conscious, if he had not correctly interpreted the strained expression of the unwinking gray eyes, whose pupils contracted as the sky flushed and kindled.

Digitized by Google

On the floor lay a dainty handkerchief and stooping to pick it up, he inhaled the delicate, tenacious perfume of tube-rose, which, blended with orange-flowers, he had frequently discovered when standing near her.

Placing it within reach of her fingers, he said, very gently and more tenderly than he was aware of, —

"Mrs. Gerome, —"

"Hush! I know what you have come to tell me. I knew it when I came away. Let me alone, now."

She raised her head, and turned her eyes to meet his, and he shuddered at the hard, bitter look, that came swiftly over the blanched features. For some seconds they gazed full at each other, and Dr. Grey's eyes filled with a mist that made hers seem large and radiant as wintry stars.

He knew then that his heart was no longer his own, — that this wretched, solitary woman, had installed herself in its most sacred penetralia; that she had not suddenly, but gradually, become the dearest object that earth possessed.

He did not ask himself whether she filled all his fastidious and lofty requirements, — whether she rose full-statured to his noble standard, — whether reverence, perfect confidence, and unqualified admiration would follow in the footsteps of mere affection. He neither argued, nor trifled, nor deceived himself, but bravely confessed to his own true soul, that, for the first time in his life, he loved warmly and tenderly the only woman whose touch had power to stir his quiet, steady pulses.

He had not intended to surrender his affections to the custody of any one until reason and judgment had analyzed, weighed, and cordially endorsed the wisdom of his choice; and now, although surprised at the rashness with which his heart, hitherto so tractable and docile, vehemently declared allegiance to a new sovereign, he did not attempt to mask or varnish the truth. Thoroughly comprehending the fact that it was neither friendship nor compassion, he gravely looked the new feeling in the face, and acknowledged it, — the tyrant which sooner or later wields the sceptre in every human heart.

Had he faithfully kept his compact with himself, and followed

Digitized by Google

the injunction of Joubert, "Choose for a wife only the woman, whom, were she a man, you would choose for your friend"?

Because he found a fascination in her society, should he conclude that it was a healthful atmosphere for his sturdy, exacting, uncompromising nature?

To-day he swept aside all these protests and questions, postponing the arraignment of his heart before the tribunal of slighted and indignant reason, and allowed the newly mitred pontiff to lead him whither she chose.

Unconscious of the emotions that brought an unusual glow to his face and light to his eyes, Mrs. Gerome had dropped her head once more on her arms, and the weary, despairing expression of her countenance, as she looked at the gilded horizon, where sea and sky seemed divided only by a belt of liquid gold, — might have served for the face of some careless Vestal, who, having allowed the fire to expire on the altar she had sworn to guard sleeplessly, sat hopeless, desolate, and doomed, — watching from the dim, cheerless temple of Hestia, the advent of that sun whose rays alone could rekindle the sacred flame, and which, ere its setting, would witness the execution of her punishment.

Dr. Grey bent over her, and said, —

"I came here in quest of you, hoping to persuade you to return to the house."

"No. You came to tell me that Elsie is dead. You came to break the news as gently as possible, — and to pity and try to comfort me. You are very good, I dare say; but I wish to be alone."

"You have been too long alone, and I can not consent to leave you here."

At the sound of his subdued voice, she turned her face towards him, and, for a moment, —

> "A strange slow smile grew into her eyes,
> As though from a great way off it came
> And was weary ere down to her lips it fluttered,
> And turned into a sigh, or some soft name
> Whose syllables sounded likest sighs
> Half-smothered in sorrow before they were uttered."

Digitized by Google

"Dr. Grey, my loneliness transcends all parallels, and is beyond remedy. Why should I not stay here? All places are alike to me, now. That cold, silent corpse at the house, is not Elsie; and, since she has been taken, I shall be utterly alone, go where I may."

She shivered, and he picked up a crape shawl lying in a heap under the table, and wrapped it around her. The soft folds were damp, and, as he lifted the veil of hair, to draw the shawl closer about her shoulders and throat, he felt that it was moist from the humid atmosphere.

"Sir, I am not cold,—I wish I were. It is useless to wrap up my body so warmly, and leave my heart shivering until death freezes it utterly."

Dr. Grey took her beautiful white hands in his warm palms, and held them firmly.

"Mrs. Gerome, you do not know what is best for you, and must be guided by one who will prove himself your truest friend."

"Don't mock my misery! I never had but one friend, and henceforth must live friendless. I knew what was before me, and therefore I dreaded this dark, dark day, and begged you to save her. She was the world to me. She supplied the place of father, mother, husband, society, and because God saw that her loving sympathy and care made my existence a trifle less purgatorial than He saw fit to render it, He took her away. My poor Elsie would quit the highest throne in heaven to come back to her desolate, dependent child; for only she knew how and why I trusted and leaned upon her. Ah, God! it is hard that I who have so long shunned strangers should be at their mercy, in the last hour of trial that can be devised by fiends, or allowed by heaven to afflict me."

She struggled to free her hands and hide her face, but her companion clasped them in one of his, and attempted to draw her head down to his shoulder.

"No, sir! The grave is the only resting-place for my poor, accursed head. Do not touch me."

Digitized by Google

She shrank as far as possible from him, and her voice, hitherto so firm and dry, trembled.

"Mrs. Gerome, I intend to take Elsie's place. You had confidence in her sagacity and penetration, and know that she was cautious in all things. During her long illness she studied my character and antecedents, and finally begged me to take you under my guardianship when she could no longer watch over you. She was importunate in her appeal, and to comfort and compose her I gave her a solemn promise that at her death I would take her place. You may deem me intrusive, and perhaps presumptuously impertinent, but time proves all things, and, after a little while, you will cling to me as you so long clung to her. I shall wait patiently for your confidence; shall deserve, — and then exact it. You need a strong arm to curb and guide you, — you need a true, honest heart, to sympathize with your sorrows and difficulties, — you need a fearless friend to defend you from the assaults of gossip and malice; and all these, if God spares my life, I am resolved to be to you. You can not repulse, or offend, or chill, or wound me, for my word is sacredly pledged to the dead; and, by the grace of God, I will strictly and fully redeem it, when we meet at the last day."

The earnestness of his manner, the grave resolution of his tone, and the invincible fearlessness with which his clear, calm, penetrating eyes, looked into hers, seemed momentarily to overawe her; and she sat quite still, pondering his unexpected words. Pressing her cold fingers very gently, he continued, —

"Elsie had such confidence in my discretion, and friendly interest in your welfare, that she requested me to warn her of her approaching dissolution in order that she might communicate something, which she assured me she desired to confide to me before her death. The paralysis of her tongue prevented the fulfilment of her wish, but you saw how keenly she suffered from her inability to utter what was pressing on her heart. You can not have forgotten that her last act was to put your hand in mine, and you heard my solemn acceptance of the charge committed to me."

An expression of dread that bordered on horror, came over

Digitized by Google

her ghastly face, and her hands grasped his, almost spasmodically.

"Did she hint what she wished to tell you? Did you guess it all?"

"No. Whatever her secret may have been, it passed unuttered into that realm where all mysteries are solved. I neither know nor surmise the nature of her desired revelation, but some day when you fully understand me, I shall ask you to tell me that which she believed I ought to know. My dear madam, when I come to you and demand your confidence, I have no fear that you will withhold it."

She closed her eyes as if to shut out some painful vision, and drooped her head lower, till it rested on her chest.

The sun flashed up from his ocean bed, and, as the first beams fell on the woman's hair, Dr. Grey softly passed his broad white hand over its perfumed masses, redolent of orange flowers.

"The air is too damp for you. Come with me to the house."

She did not heed his words, and perhaps his touch on her head recalled some exquisitely painful memory, for she shook it off, and exclaimed,—

"Doubtless, like the remainder of the curious herd, you are wondering at my 'crown of glory,'—and conjecturing what dire tragedy bequeathed it to me. Sir,—

> 'My hair was black, but white my life:
> The colors in exchange are cast!
> The white upon my hair is rife,
> The black upon my life has passed.'

Dr. Grey, I understand you; but you need not stay here to keep guard over me, as if I were an imbecile or a refugee from an insane asylum. That I am not the one or the other, is attributable to the fact that my powers of endurance are almost fabulous. You fear that in my loneliness and complete isolation I may turn coward, at the last ordeal I am put through,—and, like Zeno cry out, and in a fit of desperation strangle myself? Dr. Grey, make yourself easy. I do not love my

Digitized by Google

Creator so devotedly that I must needs hurry into his presence, before He sees proper to send me a summons."

"I am afraid to leave you here, for any woman who does not love and reverence her Maker, requires a guardian. Of course you will do as you like, but I shall remain here as long as you do."

He rose, and crossing his arms on his chest, began to walk about the pavilion. She caught up her hair, twisted it hastily into a knot, and secured it with her comb. As she did so, a small cluster of double violets dropped into her lap. She had gathered them the preceding afternoon, had carried them as an offering to Elsie, who insisted that she should wear them in her hair, "they looked so bonnie just behind the little roguish ear." At her request Mrs. Gerome had placed them at the side of her head, and the old woman made her lean down that she might smell them, and leave a kiss on their blue petals. Now the sight of the withered flowers melted her icy composure, and, as she lifted the little crushed, faded bouquet, and pressed it against her wan cheek, a moan broke from her colorless lips.

"Oh, Elsie, — Elsie! How could you desert me? You knew you were all I had to love and trust, — and how could you die and leave me alone, — utterly alone, in this miserable world that has so cruelly injured me!"

She clasped her hands passionately over the flowers, and the motion caused the sapphire ring, which was now much too large, to slip from the thin finger, and roll ringing across the marble floor.

Dr. Grey picked it up, and as he replaced it, drew her hand under his arm, and led her out of the boat-house. They walked slowly, and as they ascended the steps, he saw his buggy approaching the side gate.

Opening the parlor door, he drew his companion into the room, where the Psyche lamp still burned brightly.

"Mrs. Gerome, will you trust me?"

He had hoped that a return to the house would touch her heart and make her weep, but the cold, dry glitter of her eyes disappointed him.

Digitized by Google

"Dr. Grey, I trust neither men nor women, nor even the angels in heaven; for one of them turned serpent, and if tradition be true, made earth the dismal 'Bochim' I have found it."

She turned from him, and threw herself wearily upon the divan that filled the recess of the oriel window.

Securing the door of the library, he extinguished the lamp, and closing the parlor went out to meet Salome.

CHAPTER XX.

"DOCTOR GREY, you look weary and anxious."

"I feel so, for this has been a memorable night."

"The servant who opened the gate for us said that the poor old woman died about daybreak."

"Yes; when I arrived I found her speechless, and of course could do nothing but watch her die. Come down this walk, I wish to talk to you before you go into the house."

He pointed to a serpentine walk, overarched by laurustinus, and they had proceeded some yards before he spoke again.

"Salome, I believe you told me that you had met Mrs. Gerome?"

"Yes, sir; once upon the cliffs, a mile below, I saw her for a few moments."

"She is a very eccentric woman."

"I should judge so, from her appearance."

"Her life seems to have been blighted by early griefs, and she has grown cynical and misanthropic. Loving no one but her faithful and devoted nurse, she has completely isolated herself, and consequently the death of this servant — companion — nay, foster-mother — is a terrible blow to her. I want your promise that what you may hear or witness in this

Digitized by Google

house shall not travel beyond its walls to feed the worse-than-Ugolino hunger of never-satiated scandal and gossip."

Salome's brow contracted and darkened.

"Do you class me among newsmongers and character-cannibals?"

"If I did, you certainly would not be here at this instant. I sent for you to come and take my place temporarily, as I am compelled to see a patient many miles distant, who is dangerously ill. The majority of women might go away, and comment upon the occurrences of this melancholy day, but I wish to keep sacred all that Mrs. Gerome desires to screen from public gaze and animadversion. Because she is not fond of society, it revenges itself by circulating reports detrimental to the owner of a house which is elegantly furnished, not for popular praise, but solely for her own comfort and gratification. While I regard her course as very deplorable, and particularly impolitic for one so young and unprotected, I am totally unacquainted with the reasons that control her; and, in this hour of grief and bitterness, I earnestly desire to shield her from intrusion and impertinent scrutiny."

"In other words, you wish me to have eyes and yet see not, — and having ears to hear not? You must indeed have little confidence in my good sense, and still less in my feminine sympathy for the afflicted, if you suppose that under existing circumstances I could come to the house of mourning to collect materials to be rolled as sweet morsels under the slanderous tongues, that already wag so industriously concerning 'Solitude' and its solitary mistress. Verily, I occupy a lofty niche in your estimation, and it would doubtless be pardonably prudent in you to reconsider, and bid Elbert take me home with all possible dispatch, before I see Fatima or Bluebeard."

"When will you cease to be childish, and remember that a woman's work lies before you?"

"You may date that desirable transmogrification from the hour when you cease to stir up the mud and dregs in my nature, by doubting the possibility that they will ever settle,

Digitized by Google

and leave a pure medium between your soul and mine. Just so soon, — and no sooner."

"My young friend, you are too sensitive. I now offer you the strongest proof of confidence that I can ever hope to command. Will you take charge of this stricken household in my absence, and not only superintend the arrangements necessary for the funeral, but watch over Mrs. Gerome and see that no one disturbs her?"

"You may trust me to execute her wishes and your orders."

"Thank you. There certainly is no one except you whom I would trust in this emergency. One thing more; if Mrs. Gerome leaves the house, do not lose sight of her. It may be necessary to keep a very strict surveillance over her, and I will return as soon as possible, and relieve you."

As they entered the house, Salome said, —

"You will stop at home and get your breakfast?"

"No, I shall not have time."

"Let me make you a cup of coffee before you start."

"Thank you, it is not necessary; and besides, the house is in such confusion that it would be difficult to obtain anything. Come with me."

She followed him into the dim room, where the tall but emaciated form of Elsie Maclean had been dressed for its last long sleep. The housemaid sat at the bedside, and Robert stood at one of the windows.

The first passionate burst of grief had spent itself, and the son was very calm.

At a sign from Dr. Grey he came forward, and bowed to the stranger.

"Robert, I am obliged to be absent for several hours, and Miss Owen will remain until I return. If you need advice or assistance come to her, and do not disturb Mrs. Gerome, who is lying on a sofa in the parlor. I will drive through town, and send your minister out immediately."

"You are very good, sir. Do you think the funeral should take place before to-morrow? I want to speak to my mistress about it."

Digitized by Google

"For her sake, it is advisable that it should not be delayed beyond this afternoon. It is very harrowing to know that the body is lying here, and I think she would prefer to leave all these matters to you. It would be better for all parties to have the funeral ceremonies ended this evening."

"I suppose, sir, you know that my poor mother will be buried here, in the grounds."

"For what reason? The cemetery is certainly the best place."

Robert handed a slip of paper to Dr. Grey, who read, in a remarkably beautiful chirography, the following words,—

"Robert, it was your mother's desire and is my wish that she should be buried near that cluster of deodar cedars, just beyond the mound. Send for an undertaker, and for the minister who visited her during her illness; and let everything be done as if it were my funeral instead of hers. Put some geranium leaves and violets in her dear hands, and upon her breast."

"When did you receive this?" asked Dr. Grey.

"A moment ago, Phœbe, the cook, brought it to me from my mistress."

"Of course you have no choice, but must comply with her wishes and those of the dead. Still, I regret this decision."

"Yes, sir; it is ill luck to keep a grave near the eaves of a house, and it will be bad for my mistress to have it always in sight; for she mopes enough at best, and does not sleep o'nights, and the Lord only knows what will become of her with my poor mother's corpse and coffin within ten yards of her window. Sir, how does she take this awful blow? It comforted me to know you were with her."

"She bears this affliction as she seems to have endured all others that have overtaken her, in a spirit of rebellious bitterness and defiance. I am afraid that the excitement will seriously injure her. Salome, I will return as early as the safety of a patient will permit."

Robert followed the doctor to his buggy, to consult him with reference to some of the sad details of the impending funeral, and after a hasty glance at the placid countenance of the dead, Salome went back to the hall, and sat down opposite to the

Digitized by Google

parlor door, which had been pointed out to her. Her nerves were strong, healthy, and firm, but the presence of death, the profound silence that reigned, the chill atmosphere, and dreary aspect of the house, — all conspired to oppress her heart.

Through the open door she could see the ever restless sea, and hear its endless murmuring monotone, and imagination seizing the ill-omened legends she had heard recounted concerning this spot, peopled the corners of the hall with phantoms, and every flitting shadow on the lawn became a spectre.

Now and then the servants — two middle-aged women — passed softly to and fro, and twice Robert crossed the passage, but not a sound issued from the parlor; and once, when Phœbe came with her mistress's breakfast on a waiter, and tried the bolt, she found the door locked. She knocked several times, but receiving no answer went quietly back to the kitchen.

Weary of sitting on one of the hard, uncomfortable walnut chairs, that stood with its high carved back close to the wall, Salome rose, and amused herself by studying the engravings that surrounded her. In the midst of her investigations she was startled by a loud, doleful, blood-curdling sound, that seemed to proceed from some spot immediately beneath the floor of the hall. It was different from anything she had ever heard before, but resembled the prolonged howl of a dog, and rose and fell on the air like a cry from some doomed spirit.

Robert came out of the room which his mother had always occupied, and, as he passed Salome, she asked, —

"What is the matter? What is the meaning of that horrible noise?"

"Only the greyhound howling at the dead that he knows is lying over his head. Ah, ma'am! The poor brute sees what we can't see, and his death-baying is awful."

"Where is he? The sound seems to come through the floor."

"He is so savage that I was afraid he would hurt some of the strangers who will come here to-day, so I chained him in the basement. Hist, ma'am! Did you ever hear anything so dreadful? It raises the hair of my head."

Digitized by Google

He went down stairs, and the howling, which was caused by the fact that the dog was hungry and unaccustomed to being chained, ceased as soon as he was set free. Ere long Robert came back, followed by the greyhound, whose collar he grasped firmly. At sight of Salome he growled and plunged towards her, but Robert was on the alert, and held him down. Leading him to the parlor door, the gardener knocked, and put his mouth to the key-hole.

"If you please, ma'am, will you let Greyhound in? It won't do to leave him at large, and when I chain him he almost lifts the roof with his howls."

No reply reached Salome's strained ears, but the door was opened sufficiently to admit the dog, who eagerly bounded in, and then the click of the lock once more barred intrusion; and when the joyful barking had ceased, all grew silent once more.

From a basket of fresh flowers brought in by the boy who assisted Robert, Salome selected the white ones and made a wreath, which she laid aside and sprinkled; then gathering some rose and nutmeg geranium-leaves, and a few violets blooming in jars that stood on the gallery, she cautiously glided into the chamber of death, and arranged them in Elsie's rigid hands.

Soon after, the undertaker and minister arrived, and while they conferred with Robert concerning the burial service, the girl went back to her vigil before the parlor door, and endeavored to divert her thoughts by looking into a volume of poems that lay on the hall table. The book opened at "Macromicros," where a brilliant verbena was crushed between the leaves, and delicate undulating pencil-lines enclosed the passage beginning, —

> "O woman, woman, with face so pale!
> Pale woman, weaving away
> A frustrate life at a lifeless loom."

Slowly the hours wore away, and at noon Elsie's body was placed in the coffin and left on a table in the room opposite the parlor.

It was two o'clock when Dr. Grey came up the steps, looking more fatigued than Salome had ever seen him. He sat down

Digitized by Google

beside her on the gallery, and sighed as he caught a glimpse of the men who were bricking up the grave that yawned on the right hand side of the lawn.

"Where is Mrs. Gerome?"

"In the parlor. Once I heard her pacing the floor very rapidly, and saying something to her dog. Since then — two hours ago — not a sound has reached me."

"She has taken no food?"

"No, sir. The servant who prepared her breakfast knocked twice at the door, but was refused admittance."

Dr. Grey went into the hall, and rapped vigorously on the door, but there was no movement within.

"Mrs. Gerome, please permit me to speak to you for a few minutes. If it were not necessary, I would not disturb you."

The appeal produced no effect; and, without hesitation, he walked to the door of the library or rear parlor, — took the key from his pocket, opened it, and entered.

The dog was asleep on the velvet rug before the hearth, and his mistress sat at her escritoire, with her arms resting on the blue desk, and her face hidden upon them. A number of letters and papers were scattered about, and, in an open drawer a silver casket was visible, with a pearl key in its lock.

Before the marble Harpocrates stood two slender violet-colored Venetian glasses, representing tulips, and filled with fuchsias and clematis that were dropping their faded velvet petals, and the atmosphere was sweet with the breath of carnations and mignonette blooming in the south window.

Dr. Grey hoped that Mrs. Gerome had fallen asleep; but when he bent over her, he saw in the mirror above her that the large, bright eyes were gazing vacantly into the recess of the desk.

She noticed his image reflected in the glass, and instantly sat upright, spreading her hands over her papers as if to screen them. He drew a chair near hers, and put his finger on her pulse, which throbbed so rapidly he could scarcely count it.

"Have you slept at all, since I left you this morning?"

"No."

Digitized by Google

"You promised that you would not attempt to destroy yourself."

"I have kept my word."

"Yes; you 'keep it to our ear, and break it to our hope,' for you must know that unless you take some rest and refreshment, you will be seriously ill."

He saw a spark leap up in her eyes, like a bubble tossed into sunshine by a sudden ripple, and she shook back the hair that seemed to oppress her.

"Do not tease and torment me, now. I want to be quiet."

"My task is an unpleasant one, therefore I shall not postpone it. In a short time — within the next hour — Elsie will be buried, and you owe a last tribute of gratitude and respect to her remains. Will you refuse it to the faithful friend to whom you are indebted for so much affection and considerate care?"

"She would not wish me to do anything that is so repugnant, so painful to me."

"Have you no desire to look at her kind, placid face once more?"

"I wish to remember it as in life, — not rigid and repulsive in death."

"She looks so tranquil you would think she was sleeping."

"No, — no! Don't ask me. I never saw but one corpse, and that was of a sailor drowned in mid ocean, and I shall never be able to forget its ghastliness and distortion as it lay on deck, under sickly moonshine."

"Mrs. Gerome, you must follow Elsie's body to the grave. Believe that I have good reasons for this request, and grant it."

She shook her head.

"Your habits of seclusion have subjected you to uncharitable remarks, and your absence from the funeral would create more gossip than any woman can afford to give grounds for. There is a rumor afloat that you are deranged, and the best refutation will be your quiet presence at the grave of your faithful nurse."

She straightened herself, haughtily.

Digitized by Google

"Seven years ago I turned my back upon the world, and scorned its verdict."

"The men or women who defy public opinion invite social impalement, and rarely fail to merit the branding and oppro brium they invariably receive. Madam, I should imagine that to a nature so refined and shrinking as yours, almost any trial would seem slight in comparison with the certainty of becoming a target for sarcasm, pity, and malice, in every kitchen in the neighborhood. Permit my prudence to prevail over your reluctance to the step I have advised, and some day you will thank me for my persistency. You have time to make the proper changes in your dress, and, when the hour arrives, I will knock at your own door. My dear madam, do not delay."

She rose, and began to replace the papers in the drawers of her desk, which she closed and locked.

"Dr. Grey, why should you care if I am slandered?"

"Because I am now your best friend, and must tell you frankly your foibles and langers, and endeavor to guard you from the faintest breath of detraction."

"I am very suspicious concerning the motives of all who come about me; and, at times, I have been so unjust as to ascribe even my poor Elsie's devotion to a desire to control my fortune for the benefit of herself and child. Do you expect me to trust you more implicitly than I ever trusted her?"

"I shall make it impossible for you to doubt me. Come to your room. Elsie's few acquaintances will soon be here."

Mrs. Gerome thrust the key of her desk into her pocket, but a moment after, when she drew out her handkerchief, it fell on the carpet, and without observing it, she passed swiftly across the hall, and into her own apartment.

As Dr. Grey lingered to secure the door, his eye fell upon the silver key on the floor; and, placing it in his vest pocket, he rejoined Salome.

At four o'clock several of Robert's friends came and seated themselves in the room where the coffin sat wreathed with flowers; and immediately after, Mr. and Mrs. Spiewell made their appearance, accompanied by two ladies whose features

Digitized by Google

were concealed by thick veils. Robert and the servants soon joined them, and Salome stole into the room and sat down in one corner.

Dr. Grey tapped softly at the door of Mrs. Gerome's apartment, and she came out instantly, and walked firmly forward till she stood in the presence of the dead. She was dressed in black silk, and wore two heavy lace veils over her bonnet, which effectually screened her countenance. Crossing the floor, she stood at Robert's side, and the minister rose and began the burial service.

When a prayer was offered, all the other persons present bowed their heads, but the mistress of the mansion remained erect and motionless; and, as the pall-bearers took up the coffin and proceeded to the grave, she followed Robert.

Dr. Grey stepped to her side and offered his arm, but she took no notice of the act, and walked on as if she were an automaton.

The service was concluded, the coffin lowered, and, amid Robert's half-smothered sobs, the mound was raised under the deodars, whose long shadows slanted athwart it, in the dying sunlight.

The little group dispersed, and Mr. Spiewell led his wife to the owner of "Solitude."

"Mrs. Gerome, Mrs. Spiewell and I have long desired the pleasure of your acquaintance, and hope, if you need friends, you will permit us —"

"Thank you for your kindness in visiting my faithful old Elsie."

The tall, veiled figure had cut short his speech by a quick, imperative gesture of her hand; and, turning instantly away, disappeared in one of the densely shaded walks that wound through the grounds.

Dr. Grey escorted the party to their carriages, and as he handed Mrs. Spiewell in, she said, in her sharp nasal tones, —

"I heard that Mrs. Gerome was devotedly attached to the poor old creature who had nursed her, but she certainly seems to me very indifferent and heartless."

"She is more deeply afflicted by her loss than you can

Digitized by Google

possibly realize, and I am exceedingly apprehensive that she will be ill in consequence of her inability to sleep or eat. My dear madam, we must not judge too hastily from appearances, else we shall deserve similar treatment. Who are those two ladies veiled so closely?"

"Friends, I presume, or they would not be here."

But the little woman seemed uneasy, and flushed under the doctor's searching gaze.

"I hope dear Miss Jane is as well as one can ever expect her to be in this life. Come, Charles; you forget, my dear, that we have a visit to make before tea-time. I notice, doctor, that you have a new carpet on the floor of your pew, and a new cushion-cover to match; and, indeed, you are so fine that the remainder of the church seems quite faded and shabby. Good evening, doctor; my love to all at home."

The clergyman's gray pony trotted off with his master and mistress, and Dr. Grey returned to Salome, who waited for him at the steps of the terrace.

"What do you suppose brought Mrs. Channing and Adelaide to the poor old woman's funeral?" asked the orphan.

"How did you discover them?"

"I found this handkerchief, whose initials I embroidered two months ago, and recognize as belonging to Mrs. Channing. As for Miss Adelaide, when she moved her veil a little aside to peep at Mrs. Gerome, I caught a glimpse of her pretty face Do they visit here?"

"Certainly not; nobody visits here but the butcher, baker, and doctor. Those ladies came solely on a tour of inspection, and to gratify a curiosity that is not flattering to their characters. My dear child, you look tired."

"Dr. Grey, what is there so mysterious about this house and its owner that all the town is agog and agape when the subject is mentioned? What is Mrs. Gerome's history?"

"I am totally unacquainted with its details, and only know that since she became a widow, she has been a complete recluse. She is very unhappy, and we must exert ourselves to cheer her. This has been a lonely, dreary day to you, I fear, and I trust

Digitized by Google

it will not be necessary for me to ask you to remain here to-night."

The sun had set, leaving magnificent cloud-pictures on sky and sea, and while the orphan turned to enjoy the glorious prospect above and around her, Dr. Grey went in search of the lonely woman who now continually occupied his thoughts.

She was standing under the pyramidal cedars, looking down at the new grave, where Salome's wreath hung on the head-board, and hearing approaching footsteps would have moved away, but he said, pleadingly, —

"Do not avoid me."

She paused, and suddenly held out her hands to him.

"Ah, — is it you? Dr. Grey, what shall I do? How can I bear to live here, — alone, — alone."

He took her hands and looked down into her white, chill face.

"My dear friend, take your suffering heart to God, and He will heal, and comfort, and strengthen you. If He has sorely afflicted you, try to believe that Infinite love and mercy directed all things, and that ultimately every sorrow of earth will be overruled for your eternal repose and happiness. Remember that this world is but a threshing-floor, where angels use afflictions as flails, to beat the chaff and dust from our hearts, and present them as perfect grain for the garners of God. I know that you are desolate, but you can never be utterly alone, since the precious promise, 'Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'"

Despairingly she shook her head.

"All that might comfort some people, but it falls on my ears and heart like the sound of the clods on Elsie's coffin. I have no religion, — no faith, — no hope, — in time or eternity. My miserable past entombs all things."

"Do not unearth your woes, — let the grave seal them. Your life stands waiting to be sanctified, — dedicated to Him who gave it. My dear friend, —

> 'Cleanse it and make it pure, and fashion it
> After His image: heal thyself; from grief
> Comes glory, like a rainbow from a cloud.'"

Digitized by Google

The sound of his voice, more than the import of his words, seemed to soothe her, for her eyes softened; but the effect was transitory, and presently she exclaimed, --

"Mere 'sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal!' Pretty words, and musical; but empty as those polished shells yonder, that echo only hollow strains of the never silent sea. Once, Dr. Grey, —"

She paused, and a shiver crept through her stately form; then she slowly continued, in a tone of indescribable pathos,—

"Once I could have listened to your counsel, for once my soul was full of holy aims, and my heart as redolent of pure Christian purposes as a June rose is of perfume; but now,—

'They are past as a slumber that passes,
As the dew of a dawn of old time;
More frail than the shadows on glasses,
More fleet than a wave or a rhyme.'"

Dr. Grey drew her arm through his, and silently led her to the house, and into the parlor. He noticed that her breathing was quick and short, and that she sank wearily upon the sofa, as if her strength had well-nigh failed her.

He untied her bonnet-strings and removed it, and she threw her head down on the silken cushion, as a spent child might have done.

Taking a vial from his pocket, he dropped a portion of the contents into a wine-glass, and filled it with sherry wine.

"Mrs. Gerome, drink this for me. It will benefit you."

She swallowed the mixture, and remained quiet for some seconds; then a singularly scornful smile curved her mouth as she said, —

"You drugged the wine. Well, so be it. Nepenthe or poison are alike welcome, if they bring me death, or even temporary oblivion."

Katie came in and lighted the lamp, and Dr. Grey sat beside the sofa and watched the effect of his prescription.

Tired at length of the sober sea and dark gloomy grounds, Salome came back to the house and stood on the threshold of

Digitized by Google

the parlor door, looking curiously at the quiet, silent group, and at the pictures on the walls.

She could see very distinctly the beautiful white face of the mistress pressed against the blue damask cushion, and clear in outline as she had once observed it on the background of ocean; and she noticed that the features were sharper and that the figure was thinner. From the silvery lamp-light the gray hair seemed to have caught a metallic lustre on the ripples that ebbed back from the blue-veined temples, and the woman looked like a marble snow-crowned image, draped in black.

With one elbow on his knee, and his cheek resting in his hand, Dr. Grey leaned forward, studying the features turned towards him, and watching her with almost breathless interest. He was not aware of Salome's presence, and was unconscious of the strained, troubled gaze, that she fixed upon him.

The tender love that filled his heart looked out of his grave deep eyes, which never wandered from the face so dear to him, and moved his lips in an inaudible prayer for the peace and welfare of the lonely waif whom Providence or fate had brought into his path, to evoke all the tenderness latent in his sturdy, manly nature.

In the twinkling of an eye, Salome had learned the whole truth; and standing there, she staggered and grasped the doorway for support, wishing that the heavens and earth would pass away — that death might smite her, and end the agony that never could be patiently endured.

Recently she had tutored herself to bear the loss of his love and the deprivation of his caresses, — she had mapped out a future in which her lot was one of loneliness, — but through all the network of coming years there ran like a golden cord binding their destinies the precious hope that at least Dr. Grey would die as he had lived hitherto, — without giving to any woman the coveted place in his heart, where the orphan would sooner have reigned than upon the proudest throne in Europe.

She had prayed that, with this assurance, God would help her to be contented — would enable her to make her life useful and pure, and, like Dr Grey's, a blessing to those about her.

Digitized by Google

It had never occurred to her that the man whom she revo renced above all things human or divine, and whose exalted ideal of feminine perfection soared as far above her as the angels in Lebrun's "Stoning of St. Stephen" soared above the sinning multitude below them — that the man whose fastidiousness concerning womanly character and deportment seemed exaggerated and almost morbid, could admire or defend, much less love that gray-haired widow, whom the world pronounced either a lunatic, or a scoffing, misanthropic infidel.

The discovery was so unexpected, so startling, that it partially stunned her; and, like one addicted to somnambulism, she softly crossed the room and stood behind Dr. Grey's chair.

He had taken Mrs. Gerome's hand to examine her pulse, and retained it in his, looking fondly at the dainty moulding of the fingers and the exquisite whiteness of the smooth skin. How long she stood there Salome never knew, for paralysis seemed creeping, numb and cold, over her heart and brain.

Dr. Grey saw that his exhausted patient was asleep, and knew that the opiate he had administered in the wine would not relinquish its hold until morning; and when her breathing became more quiet and regular he bent his head and softly kissed the hand that lay heavily in his.

Salome covered her face and groaned; and rising, he was for the first time cognizant of her presence. His face flushed deeply.

"How long have you been here?"

"Long enough to discover why you visit 'Solitude' so often."

He could not see her countenance, but her unnaturally hollow tone pained and shocked him.

"You are very much fatigued, my dear child, and as soon as I have given some directions to Robert, I will take you home. Get your bonnet, and meet me at the door."

He took a shawl that was lying on the piano and laid it carefully over the sleeper, then bent one knee beside the sofa, and mutely prayed that God would comfort and protect the woman who was becoming so dear to him.

Digitized by Google

With one long, anxious, tender look into her hopeless yet beautiful face, he left the room and went in search of Robert and Katie. When he had given the requisite directions, and descended the steps, he found Salome waiting, with her fingers grasping the side of the buggy. Silently he handed her in; and, as she sank back in one corner and muffled her face, they drove swiftly through the sombre grounds, where the aged trees seemed murmuring in response to the ceaseless mutter of the sullen sea.

"Whom first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And Life indeed is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead.
And then we women can not choose our lot."

CHAPTER XXI.

"UPIAN, you certainly do not intend to sit up again to-night? Even brass or whitleather would not stand the wear and tear that your constitution is subjected to. You really make me unhappy."

"My dear Jane, it would make you still more unhappy if from mere desire to promote my personal ease and comfort, I could forget the solemn responsibility imposed by my profession. Moreover, my physical strength is quite equal to the tax I exact from it."

"I doubt it, for we have all remarked how pale and worn you look."

"My jaded appearance is attributable to mental anxiety, rather than bodily exhaustion."

"If Mrs. Gerome is so ill as to require such unremitting care and vigilance, she should have a nurse, instead of expecting a physician to devote all his time and attention to her. Where is Hester Denison?"

Digitized by Google

"I have placed her at the steam-mill above town, where there is a bad case of small-pox, and even if she were not thus engaged, I should not take her to 'Solitude.'"

"Pray, why not? She took first-rate care of me when I was so sick last year."

"Mrs. Gerome is morbidly sensitive at all times, and at this juncture I should be afraid to introduce a stranger into her sick room."

"When people are so excessively nervous about being seen, I can't help feeling a little suspicious. Do you suppose that Mrs. Gerome loved her husband so much better than the majority of widows love theirs, that seven years after his death she can't bear to be looked at? I like to see a woman show due respect to her husband's memory, but I tell you my experience — or rather my observation — leads me to believe that these young widows who make the greatest parade of their grief, and load themselves with crape and bombazine till they can scarcely stagger under their flutings, flounces, and jet-fringes, are the most anxious to marry again."

"Stop, my darling sister! Who has been filing your tongue and curdling all the 'milk of human kindness' in your generous heart? If women refuse to each other due sympathy in sorrow, to what quarter can they turn for that balm which their natures require? I never before heard you utter sentiments that trenched so closely upon harsh uncharitableness. Your lips generally employ only the silvery language of leniency, which I so much love to hear, but to-day they adopt the dialect of Libeldom. Recollect, my dear sister, that even the pagan Athenians would never build a temple to Clemency, which they contended found her most appropriate altars in human hearts."

"Pooh, Ulpian! You need not preach me such a sermon, as if I were a heathen. Facts, when they happen to be real facts, are the best umpires in the world, and to their arbitrament I leave my character for charity. When Reuben Chalmers died, his wife was so overwhelmed with grief that she shut herself up like a nun; and when she drove out for fresh air wore

Digitized by Google

two heavy crape veils, and never allowed any one to catch a glimpse of her countenance. Not even to church did she venture, until one morning, at the end of two years, she laid aside her weeds, clad herself in bridal array, was married in her own parlor, and the next Sunday made her first appearance in public after the death of her husband, leaning on the arm of her second spouse. Now, that is true, — is no libel, — pity it is not! Though 'one swallow does not make a summer,' I can't help feeling suspicious of very young and hopelessly inconsolable widows, and am always reminded of Anastasia Chalmers. So you see, my blue-eyed preacher, when your old Janet talks of these things, she is not caught 'reckoning without her host.'"

"One deplorable instance should not bias you against an entire class, and the beautiful constancy of Panthea ought to neutralize the example of a hundred Anastasia Chalmers. Is it not unfortunate that poor human nature so tenaciously recollects all the evil records, and is so oblivious of the noble acts furnished by history? Do cut the acquaintance of the huge family of *on dits*, who serve the community in much the same capacity as did the cook of Tantalus, when he dressed and garnished Pelops for the banquet table. Unluckily, devouring malice can not furnish the 'ivory shoulder' requisite to mend its mischief. We are all prone to forget the injunction, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' and instead of remembering that we are directed to bear one another's burdens, we gall the shoulders of many, by increasing the weights we should lighten. Janet, don't flay all the poor young widows; leave them to such measure of peace as they may find among their weeds."

Miss Jane listened to her brother's homily with a half-smile lurking about the puckered corners of her eyes and mouth, and putting her finger in the button-hole of his coat, drew him closer to her, as they sat together on the sofa.

"How long since you took the tribe of widows under your special protection?"

"Since the moment, that, owing to some inexplicable freak, my dear Janet suffered 'evil communications to corrupt' her 'good manners,' and absolutely forgot to be just and generous."

Digitized by Google

He kissed his sister and rose, but the troubled look that settled once more on his countenance did not escape her observation.

"Ulpian, is Mrs. Gerome very ill?"

"Yes, I am exceedingly unhappy about her. She is dangerously ill with a low, nervous, fever that baffles all my remedies."

Dr. Grey walked up and down the room, and Miss Jane pressed her spectacles closer to her nose, and watched him.

"If the poor woman leads such a lonely, miserable life, I should think that death would prove a blessed release to her. Of course it is natural and reasonable that you should desire to save all your patients, but why are you so very unhappy about her?"

He did not answer immediately, and when he spoke his deep tone was tremulous with fervent feeling.

"Because I find that she is dearer to me than all the other women in the world, except my sister; and her death would grieve me more than any trial that has yet overtaken me — more than you can realize, or than I can express."

He took Miss Jane's face in his hands, kissed her, and left the room.

Meeting Muriel and Salome in the hall, the former seized his arm, and exclaimed,—

"You shall not leave home again! Let me tell Elbert to put up your buggy. If you continue to work yourself down, as you are now doing, you will be prematurely old, and gray, and decrepit. Come into the parlor, and let me play you to sleep."

"I heartily wish I could follow your pleasant prescription, but duty is inexorable, and knows no law but that of obedience."

"Must you sit up to-night? Is that poor lady no better?"

"I can see no improvement, and must remain until I do."

"You are afraid that she will die?"

"I hope that God will spare her life."

His serious tone awed Muriel, who raised his hand to her lips, and murmured,—

"My dear doctor, I wish I could help you. I wish I could do something to make you look less troubled."

Digitized by Google

"You can help me, little one, by being happy yourself, and by aiding Salome in cheering my sister, while I am forced to spend so much time away from her. Good evening. Take care of yourselves till I come home."

Humming a bar of a Genoese barcarole, Muriel ran up stairs to join her governess; but Salome turned and followed the master of the house to the front door.

"Dr. Grey, can I render you any assistance at 'Solitude'?"

"Thank you, — the time has passed when you might have aided me. Two weeks ago, when I requested you to go with me, Mrs. Gerome was rational and would have yielded to your influence, but now she is delirious and you could accomplish nothing. The servants are faithful and attentive, and can be trusted during my absence to execute my orders."

A bright flush rose to Salome's temples, and her eyes drooped beneath his, so anxious and yet so calmly sad.

"At the time you spoke to me I could not go, but now I really should be glad to accompany you. Will you take me?"

"No, Salome."

"Your reason, Dr. Grey?"

"Is one whose utterance would pain you, consequently I trust you will pardon me for withholding it."

"At my own peril, I demand it."

"The motive which prompts your offer precludes the possibility of my acceptance."

"How dare you sit in judgment on my motives? You who prate and homilize of charity! charity! and who quote the 'golden rule' solely for the edification and guidance of those around you. Example is more potent than precept, and we are creatures of imitation. Suppose I should question the disinterestedness of your motives in allowing one patient to monopolize your attention to the detriment of the remainder? Of course you would be shocked and think me presumptuous, for one's sins and follies often play hide and seek, and sometimes we insult our own pet fault when we find it housed in some other piece of flesh."

"Good night, Salome. I shall endeavor to forget all this,

Digitized by Google

since I am too sincerely your friend to desire to set your hasty words in the storehouse of memory."

He looked down pityingly, sorrowfully, into her angry imperious eyes, and sudden shame smote her, making her cheeks glow and tingle as if from the stroke of an open hand.

"Dr. Grey, wait one moment! Let me say something, that will show, — that will — "

"Only make matters worse. No, Salome, I have little time for trifling, still less for recrimination, none at all for dissimulation; and, in your present mood, the least we can say will prove the most powerful for good."

He went down to his buggy, but stopped and reflected; and fearing that he might have been too harsh, he turned and approached her, as she stood leaning against one of the columns of the gallery.

"Do not think me rude. I am not less your friend than formerly, though I am anxious, and doubtless appear preoccupied. Let us shake hands in peace."

He extended his own, but the girl stood motionless, and the remorseful anguish and humiliation of her uplifted face touched his heart.

"Dr. Grey, if you really forgive and forget, prove it by taking me to 'Solitude.'"

"Do not ask what you well know I have quite determined it is best that I should not grant."

The spark leaped up lurid as ever, in her dilating eyes.

"You take this method to punish me for my refusal to comply with your wishes a fortnight since?"

"I have neither the right nor inclination to punish you in any respect, and you must pardon my inability to accede to a request which my judgment does not approve. Good-by."

He put his hand into his pocket, and left her; and while she stood irresolute and disappointed, a servant summoned her to Miss Jane's presence.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the orphan, observing the cloud on the old lady's brow.

"Yes, dear; sit down here and talk to me. I feel lonely,

Digitized by Google

now that Ulpian is away so constantly. He seems very uneasy about that woman at 'Solitude,' and I never saw him manifest so much anxiety about any one. By the by, Salome, tell me something concerning her."

"I have already told you all I know of her."

"Wherein consists her attractiveness?"

"Who said she was attractive? She is handsome, and there is something peculiar and startling about her, but she is by no means a beauty. I have heard Dr. Grey say that she possessed remarkable talent, but I have been favored with no exhibition of it. Why do you not question your brother? Doubtless it would afford him much pleasure to furnish an inventory of her charms and accomplishments, and dilate upon them *ad libitum*."

"What makes you so savage?"

"Simply because there happens to be a touch of the wild beast in my nature, and I have not a doubt that if the doctrine of metempsychosis be true, I was a tawny dappled leopardess or a green-eyed cougar in the last stage of my existence. Miss Jane, sometimes I feel as if it would be a luxury — a relief — to crunch and strangle something or somebody, — which is not an approved trait of orthodox Christian character, to say nothing of meek gentility and lady-like refinement."

She laughed with a degree of indescribable scorn and bitterness that was pitiable indeed in one so young.

"There is an evil fit on Saul."

"Yes; and you are neither my harp nor my David."

"Does my little girl expect to find a 'cunning player,' who will charm away all the barbarous notions that occasionally lead her astray, and tempt her to wickedness?"

"Verily, — no. The son of Jesse has forsaken his own household, and made unto himself an idol elsewhere; and I — Saul — surrender to Asmodeus."

Miss Jane laid her hand on the girl's arm, and said, in a hesitating, troubled manner, —

"Has Ulpian told you?"

"Why should he tell me? My eyes sometimes take pity on my ears, — and seeing very distinctly, save the necessity of

Digitized by Google

hearing. My vision is quite as keen now as when, in my anterior existence, I crouched in jungles, watching for my prey. Oh, Miss Jane! if you could look here, and know all that I have suffered during the past three weeks, you would not wonder that the tiger element within me swallows up every other feeling."

She struck her hand heavily upon her heart, and the old lady was frightened and distressed by the glitter of the eyes and the dilation of the slender nostrils.

"When I came in, I knew from your countenance that you had heard something which you desired to prepare me for,—which you intended to break gently to me. But your kindness is unavailing. The truth crashed in on my heart without premonition; and I saw, and understood, and accepted the inevitable; and since then,—ah, my God! since then—"

Her head drooped upon her bosom, and a groan concluded the sentence.

"Perhaps Ulpian only pities the poor woman's desolation, and will lose his interest in her when she recovers her health. You know how tenderly he sympathizes with all who suffer, and I dare say it is more compassion than love."

"What hypocrites we often are, in our desire to comfort those whom we see in agony! Miss Jane, your kind heart is holding a hand over the mouth of conscience, to smother its cries and protests while you utter things in which you know there is no truth. You mean well; but you ought to know better than to expect to deceive me. I understand the difference between love and compassion, and so do you; and Dr. Grey has not kept the truth from you. He has given his heart to that gray-haired, gray-eyed woman,—and if she lives, he will marry her; and then, if there were twenty oceans, I should want them all to roll between us. I tell you now, I can not and will not stay here to see the day that makes that pale gray phantom his wife. I should go mad, and do something that might add new horrors to that doomed and abhorred 'Solitude,' that has become Dr. Grey's Mecca. I could live without his love, but I can not stand tamely by and see him lavish it on another. Some women,—such, for instance, as we read of in novels, would meekly endure

Digitized by Google

this trial, as one appointed by Heaven to wean them from earth would fold their hands, and grow devout, and romantically thin and wan,—and get sweet, patient, martyr expressions about their unkissed lips; but I am in no respect a model heroine, and it will prove safer for us all if I am far away when Dr. Grey brings his bride to receive your sisterly embrace. If you are lonely, send for Muriel and Miss Dexter, and let them entertain you. Just now, I am not fit company for any but the dwellers in Padalon; so let me go away where I can be quiet."

"Stay, Salome! Where are you going?"

"To walk."

The orphan disengaged her dress from Miss Jane's fingers, which had clutched its folds to detain her, and made her escape just as Muriel tapped at the door.

During the three weeks that had elapsed since Elsie's death, Mrs. Gerome had not left the house, and the third day after the funeral she laid her head down on the pillow from which it seemed probable she would never again lift it.

A low steady fever seized her, and at length her brain became so seriously affected that all hope of recovery appeared futile and delusive. In the early stages of her illness, Dr. Grey requested Salome to assist him in nursing her, but the girl dared not trust herself to witness the manifestations of an affection that nearly maddened her, and had almost rudely refused compliance.

As the days wore drearily on, and Dr. Grey's haggard, anxious countenance, told her that her rival was indeed upon the brink of dissolution, a wild hope whispered that perhaps she might be spared the fierce ordeal she so much dreaded; that if Mrs Gerome died, the future might brighten,—life would be endurable. In her wonted impulsive manner, the girl had thrown herself on her knees, and passionately prayed the Almighty to remove from earth the one woman who proved an obstacle to all her hopes of peace and contentment.

She did not pause to inquire whether her petition was not an insult to Him who alone could grant it; she neither analyzed, nor felt self-rebuked for her sinful emotions and intense hatred

Digitized by Google

of the sick woman,—but vowed repeatedly that she would lead a purer, holier life, if God would only interpose and prevent Dr. Grey from becoming the husband of any one.

She had no faith in the superior wisdom of her Maker, and would not wait patiently for the developments of His divine will toward her; but chose her own destiny, and demanded that Omnipotence should become an ally for its accomplishment. Like many who are less honest in confessing their faith, this girl professed allegiance to her Creator only so long as He appeared a coadjutor in her schemes; and, when thwarted and disappointed, fierce rebellion broke out in her heart, and annulled her oaths of fealty and obedience.

Dr. Grey was not ignorant of the emotions that swayed and controlled her conduct, and when she declared herself ready to attend the invalid, he was thoroughly cognizant of the fact that she longed to witness the death which she deemed impending; and he could not consent to see her eager eyes watching the feeble breathing of the woman whom he now loved so fervently.

While he believed that in most matters Salome would not deceive him, he realized that in one of her passionate moods of jealous hate, irremediable mischief might result, and prudently resolved to keep her beyond the pale of temptation.

It was almost dark when he reached the secluded house where he had passed so many days and nights of anxiety, and went into the quiet room in which only a dim light was permitted to burn. Katie was sitting near the bed, but rose at his approach, and softly withdrew.

Emaciated and ghastly, save where two scarlet spots burned on the hollow cheeks, Mrs. Gerome lay, with her wasted arms thrown over her head, and her eyes fixed on vacancy. Even when delirium was at its height she yielded to the physician's voice and touch, like some wild creature who recognizes no control save that of its keeper; and from his hand alone would she take the medicines administered.

Whether the influence was merely magnetic, he did not inquire, but felt comforted by the assurance that his presence had power to tranquillize her.

Digitized by Google

Now, as he drew her arms down from the pillow, and took her thin hot hand in his cool palms, a shadowy smile stole over her features, and she fixed her eyes intently on his.

"I knew you would protect me from him."

"Protect you from whom?"

"From Maurice. He is hiding yonder,—behind the window-curtain."

She pointed across the room, and a scowl darkened her countenance.

"You have only been dreaming."

"No, I am awake; and if you look behind the curtain you will find him. His eyes are burning my face."

Willing to dispel this fantasy, Dr. Grey went to the window, and, drawing aside the lace drapery, showed her the vacant recess.

"Ah, he has escaped! Well, perhaps it is better so, and there will be no blood shed. Let him go back to Edith,—'golden-haired Edith Dexter,'—and live out the remnant of his days. He came hoping to find me dead, but I am not as accommodating now as formerly. Where are those violets? Tell Elsie to bring the jars in, where I can smell them."

He took a bunch of the fragrant flowers from his coat pocket, and put them in her hand, for during her illness she was never satisfied unless there was a bouquet near her; and now, having feebly smelled them, her eyes closed.

More than once she had mentioned the name of Edith Dexter, always coupling it with that of Maurice, who she evidently believed was lurking with evil purposes around her home; and Dr. Grey was sorely perplexed to follow the thread that now and then appeared, but failed to guide him to any satisfactory solution of the mystery. He knew that since she made "Solitude" her place of residence, Mrs. Gerome had never met Muriel's governess, and he conjectured that she had either known her in earlier years or now alluded to another person bearing the same name. Miss Dexter was very fair, with a profusion of light yellow hair, and suited in all respects the incoherent description that fell from the sick woman's lips.

Digitized by Google

While at home for a short time that afternoon, Dr. Grey had spoken of the dangerous condition of his patient, and asked the governess if she had ever seen or known Mrs. Gerome. Without hesitation, Edith Dexter quietly replied in the negative.

Formerly he had indulged little curiosity with reference to the widow's history, but since she had become endeared to him, he was conscious of an earnest desire to possess himself of a record of all that had so darkened and chilled the life of the only woman he had ever loved.

Once she had been merely an interesting psychological puzzle, and in some degree a physiological anomaly; but from the day of Elsie's death, his heart had yielded more and more to the strange fascination she exerted over him; and now, as he sat looking into her face, so mournfully sharpened and blanched by disease, he acknowledged to his own soul that if she should die the brightest and dearest hopes that ever gladdened his life would be buried in her grave.

Thoroughly convinced that his happiness depended on her recovery, he prayed continually that if consistent with God's will, He would spare her to him, and save him from the anguish of a lonely life, which her love might bless and brighten.

But above the petition, — above all the strife of human love, and hope, and fear, — rose silvery clear, "Nevertheless, Father, not my will, but Thine."

During his long vigils he had allowed imagination to paint beautiful pictures of the To-Come, wherein shone the figure of a lovely wife whose heart was divided only between God and her husband, — whose life was consecrated first to Christ, secondly to promoting the happiness of the man who loved her so truly.

The apprehension of losing her was rendered still more acute by the reflection that her soul was not prepared for its exit from the realm of probation, and the thought of a separation that would extend through endless æons, was well-nigh intolerable.

If she survived this attack, he believed that his influence

Digitized by Google

would redeem and sanctify her life; if she died, would God have mercy on her wretched soul?

His faith in Providence was no jagged, quivering reed, but a strong, staunch, firm staff that had never yet failed him, and in this hour of severe trial he leaned his aching heart confidently and calmly upon it.

That some mysterious circumstances veiled the earlier portion of Mrs. Gerome's life, he had inferred from Elsie's promise of confidence, and since death denied her the desired revelation, he had put imagination upon the rack, in order to solve the riddle.

What could the old nurse wish to tell him, that she was unwilling to divulge until her latest breath? Could the stain of crime cling to that pale face on the pillow, or to those white hands that rested so helplessly in his? Had she soiled her life by any deed that would bring a blush to those thin sunken cheeks, or a flush of shame to the brow of the man who loved her? Now bending fondly over her, the language of his heart was, —

"Let her dead past bury its dead! Let the by-gone be what it may, — come sorrow, come humiliation, but I will dauntlessly shield her with my name, defend her with my strong arm, uphold her by my honor, save her soul by my prayers, comfort and gladden her heart with my deathless love."

He was well aware that this night must decide her fate, — that her feeble frame could not much longer struggle with the disease that had almost vanquished it, — and leaning his forehead against her hand, he silently prayed that God would speedily restore her to health, or give him additional grace to bear the bitter bereavement.

She slept more quietly than she had been able to do for some days, and Dr. Grey sent for Robert, who was pacing the walk that led to the stables. They sat down together on the steps at the rear of the house, and the gardener asked in a frightened, husky tone, —

"Is there bad news?"

"I see little change since noon, except that she is more quiet,

Digitized by Google

which is certainly favorable; but she is so very ill that I thought it best to consult you about several matters. Do you know whether she has made a will?"

"No, sir. How should I know it, even if she had?"

"Who is her agent?"

Robert hesitated, and pretended to be busy filling and lighting his pipe.

"Maclean, I have no desire to pry into Mrs. Gerome's affairs, but it is necessary that those who direct or control her estate should be apprised of her condition. It is supposed that her fortune is ample, and her heirs should be informed of her illness."

"She has no heirs, except —"

He paused, and after a few seconds exclaimed, —

"Don't ask me! All I know is that I heard her say she intended to leave her fortune to poor painters."

"To whom shall I write, or rather telegraph? Where did she live before she came to 'Solitude'? Who were her friends?"

"Mr. Simonton, of New York, is her lawyer and agent. Two letters have come from him since she has been sick. Of course I did not open them, but I know his handwriting. They are behind the clock in the back parlor."

"Would it not be better to telegraph him at once?"

"What good could he do? Better send for the minister, and have her baptized. Oh! but this is truly a world of trouble, and I almost wish I was safely out of it."

"If she were conscious, she would not submit to baptism; and it would not be right to take advantage of her delirium and force a ceremony to which she is opposed."

"Not even, sir, to save her soul?"

"Her soul can not be affected by the actions of others, unless her will coöperates, which is impossible in her present condition. Robert, after your mother was partially paralyzed, she said that she desired to confide something to me just before her death, and intimated that it referred to Mrs. Gerome. She wished me to befriend her mistress, and felt that I ought to

Digitized by Google

knew the particulars of her early history. Unfortunately, Elsie was speechless when I arrived, and could not tell me what she had intended to acquaint me with. I mention this fact to assure you that if your mother could trust me, you need not regard me so suspiciously."

"Dr. Grey, as far as I am concerned, you are very welcome to every thought in my head and feeling in my heart; but where it touches my mistress I have nothing to say. I will not deny that I know more than you do, but when my poor mother told me, she held my hand on the Bible and made me swear a solemn oath that what she told me should never pass my lips to any man, woman, or child. So you must not blame me, sir."

"Certainly not, Robert. But if she has any friends it is your duty to send for them at once."

Dr. Grey rose and went into the library, where for some moments he walked to and fro, perplexed and grieved. As his eye rested on the escritoire, he recollected the key which he had kept in his pocket since the hour that he picked it up from the carpet.

Doubtless a few minutes' search in its drawers and casket would place him in possession of the facts which Elsie wished to confide; but notwithstanding the circumstances that might almost have justified an investigation, his delicate sense of honor forbade the thought. Taking the letters from the mantelpiece, he turned them to the lamp-light.

Mrs. Agla Gerome,
Care of Robert Maclean,
Box 20.

———— ————.

They were post-marked New York, and from the size and appearance of the envelopes he suspected that they contained legal documents. Perhaps one of them might prove a will, awaiting signature and witnesses. Dr. Grey carried them into the room where his patient still slept, and placed them on the dressing-table. Accidentally his glance fell on a large worn Bible that lay contiguous, and brightening the light, he opened the volume, and turned to the record of births.

Digitized by Google

"Vashti Evelyn, born June 10th, 18—.

"Henderson Flewellyn, born April 17th, 18—.

"Vashti Flewellyn, born January 30th, 18—."

On the marriage record he found, —

"Married, July 1st, 18—, Vashti Evelyn to Henderson Flewellyn.

"Married, September 8th, 18—, Evelyn Flewellyn to Maurice Carlyle."

The only deaths recorded were those of Henderson and Vashti Flewellyn.

Whatever the mystery might be, Dr. Grey resolved to pursue the subject no further; but wait patiently and learn all from the beautiful lips of the white-faced sphinx, who alone possessed the right to unseal the record of her blighted life.

"Who might have been — ah, what, I dare not think!
We all are changed. God judges for us best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in heaven humbly for the rest."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE profound stillness that pervades a room where life and death grapple for mastery, invites and aids that calm, inexorable introspection, which Gotama Buddha prescribes as an almost unerring path to the attainment of peace; and, in the solemn silence of his last and memorable vigil, Dr. Grey brought his heart into complete unmurmuring subjection to the Divine will. A *soi-disant* "resignation" that draws honied lips to the throne of grace, leaving a heart of gall in the camp of sedition, could find no harbor in his uncompromisingly honest nature; and though the struggle was severe, he felt that faith in Eternal wisdom and mercy had triumphed over merely human affection and earthly hopes, and his strong soul

Digitized by Google

chanted to itself the comforting strains of Lampert's "Trust Song."

No mere gala barge, gay with paint and gaudy with pennons, was his religion; no fair summer-day toy bearing him lightly across the sun-kissed, breeze-dimpled sea of prosperity and happiness, and frail as the foam that draped its prow with lace; but a staunch, trim, steady, unpretending bark, that with unfaltering faith at the helm, rode firmly all the billows of adversity, and steered unerringly harborward, through howling tempests and impenetrable gloom. Human friendships and sympathy he considered unstable and treacherous as Peter, when he shrank from his Lord; but Christian trust was one of the silver-tongued angels of God, ringing chimes of patience and peace, far above the din of wailing, bleeding hearts, and the fierce flames of flesh martyrdom.

One o'clock found Dr. Grey sitting near the pillow, where for five hours Mrs. Gerome had slept as quietly as a tired child. The fever-glow had burned itself out, and left an ashen hue on the lips and cheeks.

Wishing to arouse her, he spoke to her several times and raised her head, but though she drank the powerful stimulant he held to her mouth, her heavy eyelids were not lifted, and when he smoothed the pillow and laid her comfortably upon it, she slumbered once more.

At the foot of the bed, with his keen yellow eyes fastened on his mistress, crouched the greyhound, his silky head on his paws; and on a pallet in one corner of the room slept Katie, ready to render any assistance that might be required.

The apartment was elegantly furnished, and green and gold tinted all its appointments. On an Egyptian marble table stood a work-box curiously inlaid with malachite and richly gilded, and there lay some withered flowers, a small thimble, and a pair of scissors with mother-of-pearl handles. Around the walls hung a number of paintings, which, with one exception, were landscapes or ocean-views; and as Dr. Grey sat watching the shimmer of lamp-light on their carved frames and varnished surfaces, they seemed to furnish images of

Digitized by Google

"Green glaring glaciers, purple clouds of pine,
White walls of ever-roaring cataracts;
Blue thunder drifting over thirsty tracts,
Rose-latticed casements, lone in summer lands, —
Some witch's bower; pale sailors on the marge
Of magic seas, in an enchanted barge
Stranded at sunset, upon jewelled sands.
Some cup of dim hills, where a white moon lies,
Dropt out of weary skies without a breath,
In a great pool; a slumb'rous vale beneath,
And blue damps prickling into white fire-flies."

No sweet-lipped, low-browed Madonnas, no rapt Cecilias, no holy Johns nor meek Stephens, no reeling Satyrs nor vine-clad *Bacchantés* relieved the eye, weary of mountain gbylls, red-ribbed deserts, and stormy surfage.

One long narrow picture baffled interpretation, and excited speculations that served in some degree to divert the sad current of the physician's thoughts.

It was a dreary plain, dotted with the "fallen cromlechs of Stonehenge," and in front of the desecrated stone altars stood a veiled woman, with her hands clasped over a silver crescent-curved knife, and her bare feet resting on oaken chaplets and mistletoe boughs, starred and fringed with snowy flowers. Under the dexterously painted gauze that shrouded the face, the outline of the features was distinctly traceable, and behind the film, — large, oracular, yet mournful eyes, burned like setting stars, seen through magnifying vapors that wreathe the horizon.

It was a solemn, desolate, melancholy picture, relieved by no flush of color, — gray plain, gray distance, gray sky, gray temple tumuli, and that ghostly white woman, gazing grimly down at the gray-haired sufferer on the low bed beneath her.

Under some circumstances, certain pictures seem basilisk-eyed, riveting a gaze that would gladly seek more agreeable subjects, and it chanced that Dr. Grey found a painful fascination in this piece of canvas that hung immediately in front of him. Wherein consisted the magnetism that so powerfully attracted him, he could not decide, but several times when the

Digitized by Google

wind blew the scalloped edge of the lace curtain between the lamp and the picture, and threw a dim wavering shadow over the figure on the wall, he almost expected to see the veil float away from the stony face, and reveal what the artist had adroitly shrouded. Now it looked a doomed "Norma," and anon the Nemesis of a dishonored faneless faith, that was born among Magi, and had tutored Pythagoras; and finally Dr. Grey rose and turned away to escape its spectral spell.

Waking Katie, he charged her to call him if any change occurred in his patient, and went to the front of the house for a breath of fresh air.

Narcissus-like, a three-quarter moon was staring down at her own image, rocked on the bosom of the sea, while dim stars printed silver photographs on the deep blue beneath them, —

"And the hush of earth and air
Seemed the pause before a prayer."

The wind that had blown steadily for two days past from the south-east, had gone down into some ocean lair; but the sullen element refused to forget its late scourging, and occasionally a long swelling billow dashed itself into froth against the stone piers of the boat-house, and the cliffs which stood like a phantom fleet along the southern bend of the beach, were fringed with a white girdle of incessant breakers.

Far out from shore the rolling mass of water was darkly blue, but now and then a wave broke over its neighbor, and in the distance the foam flashed under moonshine like some reconnoitring Siren-face, peeping landward for fresh victims; or as the samite-clad arm that Arthur and Sir Bedivere saw rise above the meer to receive Excalibar.

Following the beckoning of those snowy hands, and listening to the low musical monologue that sea uttered to shore, Dr. Grey started in the direction of the terrace, whence he could see the whole trend of the beetling coast, but some unaccountable impulse induced him to pause and look back.

The dense shadow of the trees shut out from the spot where he stood the golden radiance of the moon, but over the lawn it

Digitized by Google

streamed in almost unearthly splendor, — and there he saw some white object glide swiftly towards the group of deodars. The first solution that occurred to his mind was that Katie had fallen asleep, and Mrs. Gerome in her delirium making her way out of the house, was seeking her favorite walk; but a moment's reflection convinced him that she was too utterly prostrated to cross the room, still less the grounds, and, resolved to satisfy himself, he followed the moving object that retreated before him.

Walking rapidly but stealthily in the shadow of the trees and shrubbery, he soon ascertained that it was a woman's figure, and saw that it stopped at Elsie's grave, and bent down to touch the head-board. Creeping forward, he had approached within ten yards of her, when his hat struck the lower limbs of a large acacia, and startled a bird that uttered a cry of terror and darted out. The sound caused the figure to turn her head, and catching a glimpse of Dr. Grey, she ran under the dense boughs of the deodars, and disappeared.

He followed, and groped through the gloom, but when he emerged, no living thing was visible; and, perplexed and curious, he stood still.

After some moments he heard a faint sound, as of some one smothering a cough, and pursuing it, found himself at the boundary of the grounds. Here a thick hedge of osage orange barred egress, and he saw the woman disentangling her drapery from the thorns that had seized it.

Springing forward, he exclaimed, —

"Stand still! You can not escape me. Who are you?"

A feigned and lugubrious voice answered, —

"I am the restless spirit of Elsie Maclean, come back to guard her grave."

In another instant he was at her side, and laying his hand on the white netted shawl with which she was veiling her features, he tore it away, and Salome's fair face looked defiantly at him.

"If I had known that my pursuer was Dr. Grey, I would not have troubled myself to play the ghost farce, for of course I could not expect to frighten you off; but I hoped you were

Digitized by Google

one of the servants, who would not very diligently chase a spectre. I did not suppose that you could be coaxed or driven thus far from your arm-chair beside the bed where Mrs. Gerome is asleep."

Astonishment kept him silent for some seconds, and, in the awkward pause, the girl laughed constrainedly — nervously.

"After all your show of bravery in pursuing a woman, I verily believe you are too much frightened to arrest me if I chose to escape."

"Salome, has something terrible happened at home, that you have come here at midnight to break to me?"

"Nothing has happened at home."

"Then why are you here? Are you, too, delirious?"

Her scornful laugh rang startlingly on the still night air.

"Oh, Salome! You grieve, you shock me!"

"Yes, Dr. Grey, you have assured me of that fact too frequently — too feelingly — to permit me to doubt your sincerity. You need not repeat it; I accept the assertion that you are shocked at my indiscretions."

Compassion predominated over displeasure, as he observed the utter recklessness that pervaded her tone and manner.

"I am unwilling to believe that you would, without some very cogent reason, violate all decorum by coming alone at dead of night two miles through a dreary stretch of hills and woods. Necessity sometimes sanctions an infraction of the rules of rigid propriety, and I am impatient to hear your defence of this most extraordinary caprice."

She was endeavoring to disengage the fringe of her shawl from the hedge, but finding it a tedious operation, she caught her drapery in both hands and tore it away from the thorns, leaving several shreds hanging on the prickly boughs.

"Dr. Grey, I have no defence to offer."

"Tell me what induced you to come here."

"An eminently charitable and commendable interest in your fair patient. I came here simply and solely to ascertain whether Mrs. Gerome would die, or whether she could possibly recover."

Digitized by Google

Unflinchingly she looked up into his eyes, and he thought he had never seen a fairer, prouder, or lovelier face.

"How did you expect to accomplish your errand by wandering about these grounds, exposing yourself to insult and to injury?"

"I have been on the gallery since twilight, looking through the lace curtains at Mrs. Gerome lying on her bed, and at you sitting in the arm-chair. Her eyes are keener than yours, for she saw me peeping through the window, and told you so. When you left the room I came out among the trees to escape observation. I scorn all equivocation, and have no desire to conceal the truth, for if I am not dowered

'With blood trained up along nine centuries,
To hound and hate a lie,'

at least I hold my pauper soul high above the mire of falsehood; and

. . . . . 'The things we do,
We do: we'll wear no mask, as if we blushed.'"

They had walked away from the hedge, and Dr. Grey paused at the mound, where the Ariadne gleamed cold and white in the moonbeams that slanted across it like silver lances.

Revolving in his mind the best method of extricating the orphan from the unfortunate predicament in which her rashness had plunged her, he did not answer immediately, and Salome continued, impatiently, —

"If you imagine that I came here to act as spy upon your actions, you most egregiously mistake me, for I know all that the most rigid surveillance could possibly teach me. I heard you say that this night would prove a crisis in Mrs. Gerome's case, and I was so anxious to learn the result that I could not wait quietly at home until morning. I begged you to bring me, and you refused; consequently, I came alone. Deal frankly with me, — tell me, will that woman die?"

The breathless eagerness with which she bent towards him, the strained, almost ferocious expression of her keen eyes,

Digitized by Google

sickened his soul, and he put his hand over his face to shut out the sight of hers.

"Tell me the truth. I must and will know it."

Her sweet clear voice had become a low hoarse pant, and the knotted lines were growing harder and tighter on her beautiful brow.

"I pray ceaselessly that God will spare her to me, and I hope all things from His mercy. Another hour will probably end my suspense, and decide the awful question of life or death. Salome, if she should die, my future will be very lonely, — and my heart bereft of the brightest, dearest hopes, that have ever cheered it."

A half-smothered cry struggled across the orphan's trembling lips that had suddenly grown colorless, and he saw her clutch her fingers.

"And if she lives?"

"If she lives, and will accept the affection I shall offer her, the remainder of my years will be devoted to the work of making her forget the sorrows that have darkened the early portion of her life. I do not wish to conceal the fact that she is inexpressibly dear to me."

During the long silence that ensued, a lifetime of agony seemed compressed into the compass of a few moments, but Salome stood motionless, with her arms pressed over her aching heart, and her head thrown haughtily back, while the moonlight streamed down on her face where pride and pain were struggling for right to reign.

When all expectation of earthly happiness is smothered in a proud, passionate soul, and the future robes itself in those dun hues that only the day-star of eternity can gild, nerves and muscles shrink and shiver at the massacre of hopes which despair hews down, in the hour that it "storms the citadel of the heart, and puts the whole garrison to the sword."

Dr. Grey could not endure the sight of that fixed, hardened face, and sorely distressed by the consciousness of the suffering which he had unintentionally inflicted on one so young, he moved away, and for some time walked slowly under the

Digitized by Google

arching laurestines. Although his stern integrity of purpose acquitted him of all blame, and he could accuse himself of no word or deed that might be held amenable to conscience for the mischief and misery that had resulted from his acquaintance with this unfortunate girl, he regretted that he had remained in the same house, and, by constant association, fed the flame that absence might have extinguished.

While he pitied the weakness that had induced her to yield so entirely to the preference she indulged for him, he felt humiliated at the thought that he, who had intended to guide and elevate this wayward child of nature, had been instrumental in darkening and embittering her young life.

When he came back to the spot, whence she had not moved, and laid his hand gently on her shoulder, she smiled strangely, and

> "Unbent the grieving beauty of her brows,
> But held her heart's proud pain superbly still."

"My little sister, you must not stay here any longer. Would you prefer to go home at once in my buggy, or remain in the parlor until daylight?"

"Neither. Let me sit down on the stone terrace till the end comes. I will disturb no one. It will be three hours before day breaks, and when you know whether your idol will live or die, come and tell me. Take your hand from my shoulder."

He had endeavored to detain her, but she shrank away from his grasp, and glided down the smooth sward to the terrace which divided it from the ripple-barred and ringed sands of the shelving beach.

As he returned to the house, the wind sprang up and moaned through the dense foliage above him, and an owl, perched in some clustering bough that overhung the portico, screamed and hooted dismally. The sound was so startling that the greyhound leaped to his feet and set up an answering howl, which almost froze Katie with fright, and caused even Mrs. Gerome's heavy eyelids to unclose.

Salome sat down on the paved terrace, crossed her arms over

Digitized by Google

the low stone balustrade, and resting her chin upon them, looked out at the burnished bosom of the ocean. Just beneath her, and near enough to moisten the granite with the silvery spray, —

"Its waves are kneeling on the strand,
As kneels the human knee,
Their white locks bowing to the sand,
The priesthood of the sea."

If the old Rabbinical legend of Sandalphon be grounded in some solemn vision granted to the saints of eld, who walked in Syria, then peradventure on this night, the angel must have been puzzled indeed concerning the petitions that floated up, and demanded admission to the Eternal ear.

From the anxious heart of the sincere and humble Christian who knelt at the bedside of the invalid, rose a fervent prayer that if consistent with the Father's will, He would lay His healing hand upon the sufferer, and restore her to health and strength; while the wretched girl on the terrace prayed vehemently that God would crush the feeble flicker of life in Mrs. Gerome's wasted frame, would take from the world a woman whose existence was a burden to herself and threatened to prove a curse to others.

The passionate cry of Salome's soul was, —

"Punish me in any way, and all other ways! Send sickness, destitution, humiliation, — let every other affliction smite me; but save me from the intolerable anguish of seeing that woman his wife! O my God! the world is not wide enough to hold us both. Take her, or else call me speedily hence. I am not fit to die, but I shall never be better, if I am doomed to witness this marriage. I would sooner go down to perdition now, than live to see that thing of horror. Of two hells, I choose that which takes me farthest from her."

For the first time in her life she felt that the hours were flying, that the day of doom was rushing to meet her, and she shuddered when one after another the constellations slipped softly and solemnly down the sky, and vanished behind the dim shadowy outline of the western hills. Gradually the moon sank

Digitized by Google

so low that the sea could no longer reflect her beams, and as the mighty waste of waters slowly darkened, and the wind stiffened, and the song of the surf swelled like a rising requiem, the girl felt that all nature was preparing to mourn with her over the burial of her only hope of earthly peace.

If Mrs. Gerome died, a quiet future stretched before the orphan, and she could bear to live without the love which she had the grim satisfaction of knowing brightened no other woman's life.

The happiness of the man for whom she almost impiously prayed, was a matter of little importance compared with the ease of her own heart; and she had yet to learn that the welfare and peace of the object she loved so selfishly would one day become paramount to all other aims and considerations. That pure and sublime spirit of self-abnegation which immolates every hope and wish that is at variance with the happiness of the beloved had not yet been born in Salome's fiery nature; and she cared little for the anguish that might be Dr. Grey's portion, provided her own heart could be spared the pang of witnessing his wedded bliss.

Through the trees, she could see the steady light of the lamp that burned in the room where the sick woman lay, and so she watched and waited, shivering in the shadow that fell over earth and ocean just before the breaking of the new day.

Along the eastern horizon, the white fires of rising constellations paled and flickered and seemed to die, as a gray light stole up behind them; and the gray grew pearly, and the pearly opaline, and ere long the sky crimsoned, and the sea reddened until its waves were like ruby wine or human gore.

In the radiant dawn of that day which would decide the earthly destinies of three beings, Salome saw Dr. Grey coming across the lawn. His step was quiet, — neither slow nor hasty, and she could not conjecture the result; but as he approached, she rose, wrapped her shawl about her, and advanced to meet him. He paused, took off his hat, and she knew all before a syllable passed his lips.

"Salome, God has heard my prayers, — has mercifully taken

Digitized by Google

my darling from the arms of death, and given her to me. I do not think I am too sanguine in saying that she will ultimately recover, and my heart can not find language that will interpret its gratitude and joy."

Never before had such a light shone in his clear, calm blue eyes, and illumined his usually grave countenance; and though continued vigils and keen anxiety had left their signet on his pale face, his great happiness was printed legibly on every feature, and found expression even in the deepened and softened tones of his voice.

The girl did not move or speak, but looked steadily into his bright eyes, and the calmness with which she listened, comforted and encouraged him to hope that ere long she would conquer her preference.

How could he know that at that instant she was impiously vowing that heaven had heard her last prayer? — that never again should a petition cross her lips? God had granted one prayer, — had decided against hers, — had denied her utterly; and henceforth she would not weary Him, — she would not mock herself and her misery.

Dr. Grey saw that there was no quiver on the still, pale lips, no contraction of the polished forehead; but the rigidity of her face broke up suddenly in a smile of indescribable mournfulness, — a smile where self-contempt and pity and hopeless bitterness all lent their saddest phases.

"Dr. Grey, in your present happy mood, you certainly can not be so ungracious as to deny me a favor?"

"Have I ever refused my little sister anything she asked?"

"The only favor you can ever grant me will be to persuade Miss Jane to consent to my departure. Look to it, sir, that I am allowed to go, and that right speedily; for go I certainly shall, at all hazards. Convince your sister that it is best, and let me go away forever, without incurring the displeasure of the only friend I ever had or ever shall have."

She moved away as if to leave the grounds, but he caught her arm.

"Wait five minutes, Salome, and I will take you home in my

Digitized by Google

buggy. It is not right for you to walk alone at this early hour, and I will not allow it."

She shook off his hand as if it had been an infant's; and, as she walked away, he heard her laugh with a degree of savage bitterness that stabbed his generous heart like a dagger; while behind her trailed the hissing echo, —

. . . . "Oh, alone, alone, —
Not troubling any in heaven, nor any on earth."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN the pure, clear light of early morning, "Grassmere," with its wide, smooth lawn, and old-fashioned brick house, weather-stained and moss-mantled, looked singularly peaceful and attractive. Against the sombre mass of tree-foliage, white and purple altheas raised their circular censers, as if to greet the sun that was throwing level beams from the eastern hill-top, and delicate pink, and deep azure, and pearl-pale convolvulus held up their velvet trumpets all beaded with dew, to be drained by the first kiss of the great Day-God. Up and down the comb of the steep roof, beautiful pigeons with necklaces that rivalled the trappings of Solomon, strutted and cooed; on the eaves, busy brown wrens peeped into the gutters, —

"And of the news delivered their small souls," —

gossipping industriously; while from a distant nook some vagrant partridge whistled for its mate, and shy doves swinging in the highest elm limbs, moaned plaintively of the last hunting-season, that had proved a St. Bartholomew's day to the innocent feathered folk.

On the lawn a flock of turkeys were foraging among the clover-blossoms, and over the dewy grass a large brood of young guineas raced after their mother, or played hide-and-seek, like nut-brown

Digitized by Google

elves, under the white and purple tufts of flowers. Save the bird-world — always abroad early — no living thing seemed astir, and the silence that reigned was broken only by the distance-softened bleating of Stanley's pet lamb.

As Salome walked slowly and wearily up the avenue, she saw that the house-maid had opened the front door, and when the orphan ascended the steps, all within was still as a tomb, except the canary that sprang into its ring and began to warble a *reveille* as she approached the cage. Miss Jane was usually an early riser, and often aroused her servants, but to-day the household seemed to have overslept themselves, and when Salome had rearranged her dress, and waked her little brother, she rang the bell for Rachel, who soon obeyed the summons.

"Is Miss Jane up?"

"No, ma'am, I suppose not, as she has not rung for me. You know I always wait for her bell."

"Perhaps she is not very well this morning. I will go and see whether she intends to get up."

Salome went down stairs and knocked at the door of Miss Jane's room, but no sound was audible within, and she softly turned the bolt and entered.

The lamp was burning very dimly on a table close to the bed, and upon the open bible lay the spectacles which the old lady had placed there twelve hours before, when she finished reading the nightly chapter that generally composed her mind and put her to sleep.

Salome conjectured that she had forgotten to extinguish the lamp, and as she cautiously turned the wick down, her eyes rested on the open page where pencil-lines marked the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, and enclosed the sixth and seventh verses, "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Removing the glasses, the girl closed the book, and leaned over the pillow to look at the sleeper. She had turned her face towards the wall, and one hand lay under her head, pressed

Digitized by Google

against her cheek, while the other held her handkerchief on the outside of the counterpane.

Very softly she slumbered, with a placid smile half breaking over her aged, wrinkled features; and unwilling to shorten the morning nap in which she so rarely indulged, Salome sat down at the foot of the bed, and leaning her head on her hands, fell into a painful and profound reverie.

Nearly an hour passed, unheeded by the unhappy girl, whose anguish rendered her indifferent to all that surrounded her; and after a while a keen pang thrilled her heart, as she heard Dr. Grey's pleasant voice jesting with Stanley on the lawn. His happiness seemed an insult to her misery, and she stopped her ears to exclude the sound of his quiet laugh.

A half hour elapsed, and then his well-known rap was heard at the door. Miss Jane did not answer, and Salome was in no mood to welcome him home; but he waited for neither, and came in, gently closing the door behind him.

At sight of the orphan, he started slightly, and said, —

"Is my sister sick?"

"I don't know, but she is sleeping unusually late. I thought it best not to disturb her."

The look of dread that swept over his countenance frightened her, and she rose as he moved hastily to the bed-side.

"Salome, open the blinds. Quick! quick!"

She sprang to the window, threw the shutters wide open, and hastened back. Dr. Grey's hand was on his sister's wrist, and his ear pressed against her heart, — strained to catch some faint pulsation. His head went down on her pillow, and Salome held her breath.

"Oh, Janet! My dear, patient, good sister! This is indeed hard to bear. To die alone — unsoothed — unnoticed; with no kind hands about you! To die — without one farewell word!"

He hid his face in his hands, and Salome staggered to the bed, and grasped Miss Jane's rigid, icy fingers.

In the silence of midnight, Death stole her spirit from its clay garments, and while she slept peacefully had borne her beyond

Digitized by Google

the confines of Time, and left her resting forever in the City Celestial.

A life dedicated to pure aims and charitable deeds had been rewarded with a death as painless as the slumber of a tired child on its mother's bosom, and, without struggle or premonition, the soul had slipped from the bondage of flesh into the Everlasting Peace that remaineth for the children of God.

It was impossible to decide at what hour she had died; and when the members of the appalled household were questioned, Muriel and Miss Dexter stated that she had kissed them good-night and appeared as well as usual at her customary time of retiring; and Rachel testified that after she was in bed, she rang her bell and directed her to tell the cook that as Dr. Grey would probably come home about daylight, she must get up early and have a cup of coffee ready when he arrived. Sobbing passionately, Rachel added, —

"When I asked her if I should put out the lamp, she said, 'No; Ulpian may lose his patient, and come home sad, and then he will come in and talk to me awhile.' And just as I was leaving the room, she called to me, 'Rachel, what coat did Ulpian wear? It turns so cool now before daylight that he will take cold if he has on that linen one.' I told her I did not know, and she would not be satisfied till I went to his room and found that the linen coat was hanging in the closet, and the gray flannel one was missing. Then she opened her bible and said, 'Ah, that is all right. The flannel one will do very well, and my boy will be comfortable.'"

Dr. Grey's grief was deep, but silent; and, during the dreary day and night that succeeded, he would allow no one to approach him except Muriel, whose soft little hands, and tearful, tender caresses, seemed in some degree to comfort him.

One month before, Salome would have wept and mourned with him, but the fountain of her tears was exhausted and scorched by the intense bitterness and despairing hate that had taken possession of her since the day of Elsie's burial; and stunned and dry-eyed, she watched the preparations for the obsequies of her benefactress.

Digitized by Google

Her love for Miss Jane had never been sufficiently fervent to render her distress very poignant; but in the death of this devoted friend she was fully aware that at last she was set once more adrift in the world, without chart or rudder save that furnished by her will.

Life to-day was not the beautiful web, all aglow with the tangling of gold and silver threads, that had once charmed and dazzled her, for the mildew of hopelessness had tarnished the gilding, and the mesh was only a mass of dark knots, and subtle crossings, and inextricable confusion.

Like that lost star that once burned so luridly in Cassiopeia, and flickered out, leaving a gulf of gloom where stellar glory was, the one most precious hope that lights and sanctifies a woman's heart had waned and grown sickly, and finally had gone out utterly, and dust and ashes and darkness filled the void. In natures such as hers, this hope is not allied to the phœnix, and, once crushed, knows no resurrection; consequently she cheated herself with no vain expectation that the mighty wizard, Time, could evoke from corpse or funeral-pyre even a spark to cheer the years that were thundering before her.

A few months ago the future had glistened as peaceful and silvery as the Dead Sea at midnight, when a full-orbed Syrian moon glares down, searching for the palms and palaces that once marked Gomorrah's proud places; and, like some thirsty traveller smitten with surface sheen, she had laid her fevered lips to the treacherous margin, and, drinking eagerly, had been repaid with brine and bitumen.

Disappointment was with her no meek, mute affair, but a savage fiend that browbeat and anathematized fate, accusing her of rendering existence a mere Nitocris banquet, where, while every sense is sharpened and pampered, and fruition almost touches the outstretched hands of eager trust, the flood-gates of the mighty Nile of despair are lifted, and its chill, dusky waves make irremediable wreck of all.

With the quiet thoughtfulness and good sense that characterized her unobtrusive conduct, Miss Dexter had prepared from Muriel's wardrobe an entire suit of mourning, which she pre-

Digitized by Google

vailed upon Salome to accept and wear; and, on the morning of the funeral, the latter went down early into the draped and darkened parlor, where the coffin and its cold tenant awaited the last offices that dust can perform for dust.

She had not spoken to Dr. Grey for twenty-four hours, and, finding him beside the table where his sister's body lay, the orphan would have retreated, but he caught the rustling sound of her crape and bombazine, and held out his hand.

"Come in, Salome."

She took no notice of the offered fingers, but passed him, and went around the table to the opposite side.

The wrinkled, sallow face, still wore its tranquil half-smile, and, under the cap-border of fine lace, the grizzled hair lay smooth and glossy on the sunken temples.

In accordance with a wish which she had often expressed, the ghostly shroud was abandoned, and Miss Jane was dressed in her favorite black silk. Salome had gathered a small bouquet of the fragile white blossoms of apple-geranium, of which the old lady was particularly fond, and, bending over the coffin, she laid them between the fingers that were interlaced on the pulseless heart.

With a quiet mournfulness, more eloquent than passionate grief, the girl stood looking for the last time at the placid countenance that had always beamed kindly and lovingly upon her since that dreary day, when, under the flickering shadow of the mulberry-tree, she had called her from the poor-house and given her a happy home.

She stooped to kiss the livid lips, that had never spoken harshly to her; and, for some seconds, her face was hidden on the bosom of the dead. When she raised it, the dry, glittering eyes and firm mouth, betokened the bitterness of soul that no invectives could exhaust, no language adequately express.

"Dr. Grey, if the exchange could be made, I would not only willingly, but gladly, thankfully, lie down here in this coffin, and give your sister back to your arms. The Reaper, Death, has cut down the perfect, golden grain, and left the tares to shiver in the coming winter. Some who are useless and life-weary

Digitized by Google

bend forward, hoping to meet the sickle, but it sweeps above them, and they wither slowly among the stubble."

He looked at her, and found it difficult to realize that the pale, quiet, stern woman, standing there in sombre weeds, was the same fair young face that he had seen thirty-six hours before in the moonlight that brightened Elsie's grave. He thought that only the slow, heavy rolling of years could have worn those lines about her faded lips, and those dark purplish hollows under the steady, undimmed eyes. That composed, frigid Salome, watching him from across the corpse and coffin, seemed a mere chill shadow of the fiery, impetuous, radiant girl, whose passionate waywardness had so often annoyed and grieved him. The alabaster vase was still perfect in form, but the lamp that had hitherto burned within, lending a rosy glow to clay, had fluttered and expired, and the change was painful indeed.

His attention was so riveted upon the extraordinary alteration in her appearance, that her words fell on his ear, as empty, as meaningless, as the echoes heard in dreams, and when she ceased speaking, he looked perplexed, and sighed heavily.

"What did you say? I do not think I understand you; my mind was abstracted when you spoke."

"True; you never will understand me. Only the dead sleeping here between us fully comprehended me, and even unto the end of my life-chapter I must walk on misapprehended. When the coffin-lid is screwed down over that dear, kind face, I shall have bidden adieu to my sole and last friend; for in the Hereafter she will not know me. Ah, Miss Jane! you tried hard to teach me Christianity, but it was like geometry, I had no talent for it,—could not take hold of it,—and it all slipped through my fingers. If there is indeed an inexorable and incorruptible Justice reigning behind the stars, you will be so happy that I, and my sins, and my desolation will not trouble you. Good-by, dear Miss Jane; it is not your fault that I missed my chance of being coaxed into the celestial fold with the elect sheep, and find myself scourged out with the despised goats. God grant you His everlasting rest."

Digitized by Google

She turned, but Dr. Grey stretched his arm across his sister's body, and caught the orphan's dress.

"Salome, God has called my own sister to her blessed rest in Christ, but my adopted sister He has left to comfort, to sympathize with me. Here, in the sacred presence of my dear dead, I ask you to take her place, and be to me throughout life the true, loving, faithful friend whom nothing can alienate, and of whom only death can deprive me. My little sister, let the future ripen and sanctify our confidence, affection, and friendship."

"No, sir; sinners can not fill the niches of the saints; and today we are more completely divided than if the ocean roared between us. Once I struggled hard to cure myself of my faults, — to purify and fashion my nature anew, but the incentive has died, and I have no longer the proud aspirations that lifted me like eagle's wings high above the dust into which I have now fallen, — and where I expect to remain. You need not fear that I shall commit some capital sin, and go down in disgrace to my grave; for there must be some darling hope, some precious aim, that goads people to crime, — and neither of these have I. I do not want your friendship, and I will not allow your dictation; and, if you are as generous as I have believed you, I think you will spare me the manifestation of your pity. Miss Jane was the only link that united us in any degree, and now we are asunder and adrift. You see at least I am honest, and since I have not your confidence, I decline your compassion and espionage, and refuse to accept a sham friendship, — to trust myself upon a gossamer web that stretches across a dismal gulf of gloom, and wretchedness, and endless altercation. When I am in one continent, and you are in another, we shall be better friends than now."

Her cold, slow, measured accents, and the calm pallor of her features told how complete was the change that had set its stern seal on body and soul; and Dr. Grey's heart ached, as he realized how withering was the blight that had fallen on her once buoyant, sanguine nature.

"My dear Salome, for Janet's sake, and in memory of all

Digitized by Google

her love and counsel, let me beg you not to indulge feelings that can only result in utter —"

"Dr. Grey, let there be silence and peace between us, at least in the presence of the dead. Expostulation from your lips only exasperates and hardens me; so pray be quiet. No! do not touch me! Our hands have not clasped each other so often nor so closely that they must needs miss the warmth and pressure in the coming years of separation, and I will not soil your palm with mine."

She coldly put aside the hand that endeavored to take hers, and, after one long, sad gaze at the marble face in the coffin, turned away, and went back to her own room.

Miss Jane's charities had carried her name even to the secluded nooks of the county, and, when her death was announced, many humble beneficiaries of her bounty came to offer the last testimonial of respect and gratitude, by following the remains to their final resting-place. As the hour approached for the solemn rites, the house was filled with friends and acquaintances; and the members of the profession to which Dr. Grey belonged came to attend the funeral, and officiate as pall-bearers.

Seated beside Dr. Grey, on one of the sofas, Salome's dry eyes noted all that passed while the services were performed; and, when the hearse moved down the avenue, she took his offered arm, and was placed in the same carriage.

It was a long, dreary drive to the distant cemetery, and she was relieved to some extent when they found themselves at the family vault. Miss Jane had always desired to be buried under the slab that covered her brother, and had directed a space left for that purpose. Now the marble was removed, and the coffins of Jane and Enoch Grey rested side by side. The voice of the minister ceased, and only little Stanley's sobs broke that mournful silence which always ensues while spade or trowel does its sad work. Then the sculptured slab was replaced, and brother and sister were left to that blessed repose which is granted only to the faithful when "He giveth His beloved sleep."

Digitized by Google

"Write, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord,
Because they rest,' . . . because their toil is o'er.
The voice of weeping shall be heard no more
In the Eternal City. Neither dying
Nor sickness, pain nor sorrow, neither crying,
For God shall wipe away all tears. Rest, — rest."

In the death of his sister, Dr. Grey mourned the loss of the only mother he had ever known, for his earliest recollections were of Miss Jane's tender care and love, and his affection was rather that of a devoted son than brother; consequently, the blow was doubly painful: but he bore it with a silent fortitude, a grave and truly Christian resignation, that left an indelible impression upon the minds of Miss Dexter and Muriel, and taught them the value of a faith that could bring repose and trust in the midst of a trial so severe.

His continued vigils at "Solitude," and the profound grief that could not find vent in tears or words, had printed characters on his pale, wearied face, that should have commanded the sympathy of all who shared his friendship; but the sight of his worn features and the sound of his slow step only embittered the heart of the orphan, who saw in these evidences of fatigue and anxiety new manifestations of affection for the patient who was not yet entirely beyond danger.

Four days after the funeral, Dr. Grey came in to breakfast later than usual, having driven over very early to "Solitude;" and, as he seated himself at the table and received from Muriel's hand a cup of coffee, he leaned forward and kissed her rosy cheek.

"Thank you, my child. You are very kind to wait for me."

"How is that poor Mrs. Gerome? Will she never be well enough to dispense with your services?"

Once, Salome would have answered, "He hopes not;" but now she merely turned her head a little, to catch his reply.

"She is better to-day than I feared I should find her, as some alarming symptoms threatened her yesterday; but now I think I can safely say the danger has entirely passed."

Digitized by Google

Muriel hung over the back of his chair, pressing him to try several dishes that she pronounced excellent, but he gently refused all except the coffee; and, when he had pushed aside the empty cup, he drew the face of his ward close to his own, and murmured a few words that deepened the glow on her fair cheeks, while she hastily left the room to read a letter.

For some moments he sat with his head resting on his hand, thinking of the dear old face that usually watched him from the corner of the fire-place, and of the kind words that were showered on him while he breakfasted; but to-day the faded lips were frozen forever, and the dim eyes would never again brighten at his approach.

He sighed, brushed back the hair that clustered in glossy brown rings on his forehead, and rose.

"Salome, if you are not particularly engaged this morning, I should be glad to see you in the library."

"At what hour?"

"Immediately, if you are at leisure."

The orphan put aside the fold of crape which she was converting into a collar, and inclined her head slightly.

Since that brief and painful interview held beside Miss Jane's coffin, not a syllable had passed between them, and the girl shrank with a vague, shivering dread from the impending *tête-à-tête*.

Silently she followed the master of the house into the library, where Dr. Grey drew two chairs to the table, and, when she had seated herself in one, he took possession of the other.

Opening a drawer, he selected several papers from a mass of what appeared to be legal documents, and spread them before her.

"I wish to acquaint you with the contents of my sister's will, which I examined last night. Will you read it, or shall I briefly state her wishes?"

"Tell me what you wish me to know."

She swept the papers into a pile, and pushed them away.

"Have you ever read a will?"

"No, sir."

Digitized by Google

She leaned her elbows on the table, and rested her face in her hands.

"All these pages amount simply to this, — dear Jane made her will immediately after my return from Europe, and its provisions are: that this place, with house, land, furniture, and stock, shall be given to and settled upon you; and moreover that, for the ensuing five years, you shall receive every January the sum of one thousand dollars. Until the expiration of that period, she desired that I should act as your guardian. By reference to the date and signature of these papers, you will find that this will was made as soon as she was able to sit up, after her illness produced by pneumonia; but appended to the original is a codicil, stating that the validity of the distribution of her estate, contained in the former instrument, is contingent upon your conduct. Feeling most earnestly opposed to your contemplated scheme of going upon the stage as a *prima donna*, she solemnly declares, that, if you persist in carrying your decision into execution, the foregoing provisions shall be cancelled, and the house, land, and furniture shall be given to Jessie and Stanley; while only one thousand dollars is set apart as your portion. This codicil was signed one month ago."

Dr. Grey glanced over the sheets of paper, and refolded them, allowing his companion time for reflection and comment, but she remained silent, and he added, —

"However your views may differ from those entertained by my sister, I hope you will not permit yourself to doubt that a sincere desire to promote your life-long happiness prompted the course she has pursued."

Five minutes elapsed, and the orphan sat mute and still.

"Salome, are you disappointed? My dear friend, deal frankly with me."

She lifted her pale, quiet face, and, for the first time in many weeks, he saw unshed tears shining in her eyes, and glittering on her lashes.

"I should be glad to know whether Miss Jane consulted you, in the preparation of her will?"

"She conferred with me concerning the will, and I cordially

Digitized by Google

approved it; but of the codicil I knew nothing, until her lawyer — Mr. Lindsay — called my attention to it yesterday afternoon."

"You are very generous, Dr. Grey, and no one but you would willingly divide your sister's estate with paupers, who have so long imposed upon her bounty. I had no expectation that Miss Jane would so munificently remember me, and I have not deserved the kindness which she has lavished on me. For Jessie and Stanley I gratefully accept her noble gift, and it will place them far beyond the possibility of want; while the only regret of which I am conscious, is, that I feel compelled to pursue a career, which my best, my only friend disapproved. In the name of poor little Jessie and Stanley, I thank you, sir, for consenting to such a generous bequest of property that is justly yours. You, who —"

"Pray do not mention the matter, for independent of the large legacy left me by my sister, my own fortune is so ample that I deserve no thanks for willingly sharing that which I do not need. My little sister, you must not rashly decide a question which involves your future welfare, and I can not and will not hear your views at present. Take one week for calm deliberation, weigh the matter prayerfully and thoughtfully, and at the expiration of that time, meet me here, and I will accept your decision."

She shook her head, and a dreary smile passed swiftly over her passionless face.

"Twenty years of reflection would not alter, or in any degree bend my determination, which is as firmly fixed as the base of the Blue-Ridge; and —"

"Pardon me, Salome, but, until the week has elapsed, I do not wish or intend to receive your verdict. Before this day week, recollect all the reasons which dear Janet urged against your scheme; recall the pain she suffered from the bare contemplation of such a possibility, and her tender pleadings and wise counsel. Ah, Salome, you are young and impulsive, but I trust you will not close your ears against your brother's earnest protest and appeal. If I were not sincerely attached to you, I should not

Digitized by Google

so persistently oppose your favorite plan, which is fraught with perils and annoyances that you can not now realize. Hush! I will not listen to you to-day."

He rose, and laying his hands softly on her head, added, in a solemn but tremulously tender tone, —

"And may God in His infinite wisdom and mercy overrule all things for your temporal and eternal welfare, and so guide your decision, that peace and usefulness will be your portion, now and forever."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"YES, Dr. Grey, I am better than I ever expected or desired to be in this world."

"Mrs. Gerome, this is scarcely the recompense that my anxious vigilance and ceaseless exertions merit at your hands."

The invalid leaned far back in her cushioned easy chair, and, as the physician rested his arm on the mantel-piece and looked down at her, he thought of the lines that had more than once recurred to his mind, since the commencement of their acquaintance, —

"What finely carven features! Yes, but carved
From some clear stuff, not like a woman's flesh,
And colored like half-faded white-rose leaves.
'Tis all too thin, and wan, and wanting blood,
To take my taste. No fulness, and no flush!
A watery half-moon in a wintry sky
Looks less uncomfortably cold. And . . . well,
I never in the eyes of a sane woman
Saw such a strange, unsatisfied regard."

"I suppose I ought to be grateful to you, Dr. Grey, for Katie and Robert have told me how patiently and carefully you nursed and watched over me, during my illness; but instead of grati-

Digitized by Google

tude, I find it difficult to forgive you for what you have done. You fanned into a flame the spark of life that was smouldering and expiring, and baffled the disease that came to me as the handmaid of Mercy. Death, transformed into an angel of pity, kindly opened the door of escape from the woe and weariness of this sin-cursed world, into the calmness and dreamless rest of the vast shoreless Beyond; and just when I was passing through, you snatched me back to my burdens and my bitter lot. I know, of course, that you intended only kindness, but you must not blame me if I fail to thank you."

"You forget that life is intended as a season of fiery probation, and that without suffering there is no purification, and no reward. Remember, 'Calm is not life's crown, though calm is well;' and those who forego the pain must forego the palm."

"I would gladly forego all things for a rest, — a sleep that could know no end. Katie tells me I have been ill a month, and from this brief season of oblivion you have dragged me back to the existence that I abhor. Dr. Grey, I feel to-day as poor Maurice de Guérin felt, when he wrote from Le Val, 'My fate has knocked at the door to recall me; for she had not gone on her way, but had seated herself upon the threshold, waiting until I had recovered sufficient strength to resume my journey. "Thou hast tarried long enough," said she to me; "come forward!" And she has taken me by the hand, and behold her again on the march, like those poor women one meets on the road, leading a child who follows with a sorrowful air.'"

"There is a better guide provided, if you would only accept and yield to his ministrations. For the flint-faced fate that you accuse so virulently, substitute that tender and loving guardian the Angel of Patience.

'To weary hearts, to mourning homes,
God's meekest Angel gently comes.

. . . . . .

There's quiet in that Angel's glance,
There's rest in his still countenance!

. . . . . .

Digitized by Google

The ills and woes he may not cure
He kindly trains us to endure.
. . . . . .
He walks with thee, that Angel kind,
And gently whispers, 'Be resigned.'

A moment since, you quoted De Guérin, and perhaps you may recollect one of his declarations, 'I have no shelter but resignation, and I run to it in great haste, all trembling and distracted. Resignation! It is the burrow hollowed in the cleft of some rock, which gives shelter to the flying and long-hunted prey.' You will never find peace for your heart and soul until you bring your will into complete subjection to that of Him 'who doeth all things well.' Defiance and rebellious struggles only aggravate your sorrows and trials."

She listened to the deep, quiet voice, as some unlettered savage might hearken to the rhythmic music of Homer, soothed by the tones, yet incapable of comprehending their import; and as she looked up at the grave, kingly face, her eyes fell upon the broad band of crape that encircled his straw hat, which had been hastily placed on the mantel-piece.

"Dr. Grey, you ought to speak advisedly, for Robert told me that you had recently lost your sister, and that you are now alone in the world. You, who have severe afflictions, should know how far resignation lightens them. I was much pained to learn that your sister died while you were absent, — while you were sitting up with me. Ah, sir! you ought to have watched her, and left me to my release. You have been very kind and considerate toward one who has no claim upon aught but your pity; and I would gladly lie down in your sister's grave, and give her back to your heart and home."

Her countenance softened for an instant, and she held out her hand. He took the delicate fingers in his, and pressed them gently.

"God grant that your life may be spared, until all doubt and bitterness is removed from your heart, and that when you go down into the grave it may be as bright with the blessed faith of a Christian as that which now contains my sister Janet. Do

Digitized by Google

not allow the gloom of earthly disappointment to cloud your trust, but bear always in mind those cheering words of Saadi,—

'Says God, "Who comes towards me an inch through doubtings dim,
In blazing light I do approach a yard towards him."'

"If I am to be kept in this world until all the bitterness is scourged out of me, I might as well resign myself to a career as endless as that of Ahasuerus. I tell you, sir, I have been forced to drink out of quassia-cups until my whole being has imbibed the bitter; and I am like that tree to which Firdousi compared Mahmoud, 'Whose nature is so bitter, that were you to plant it in the garden of Eden, and water it with the ambrosial stream of Paradise, and were you to enrich its roots with virgin honey, it would, after all, discover its innate disposition, and only yield the acrid fruit it had ever borne.'"

"What right have you to expect that existence should prove one continued gala-season? When Christ went down meekly into Gethsemane, that such as you and I might win a place in the Eternal City, how dare you demand exemption from grief and pain, that Jesus, your God, did not spare Himself? Are you purer than Christ, and wiser than the Almighty, that you impiously deride and question their code for the government of the Universe, in which individual lives seem trivial as the sands of the desert, or the leaves of the forest? Oh! it is pitiable, indeed, to see some worm writhing in the dust, and blasphemously dictating laws to Him who swung suns and asterisms in space, and breathed into its own feeble fragment of clay the spark that enabled it to insult its God. Put away such unwomanly scoffing,—such irreverent puerilities; sweep your soul clean of all such wretched rubbish, and when you feel tempted to repine at your lot, recollect the noble admonition of Dschelaleddin, 'If this world were our abiding-place, we might complain that it makes our bed so hard; but it is only our night-quarters on a journey, and who can expect home comforts?'"

"I can not feel resigned to my lot. It is too hard,—too unjust."

Digitized by Google

"Mrs. Gerome, are you more just and prescient than Jehovah?"

She passed her thin hand across her face, and was silent, for his voice and manner awed her. After a little while, she sat erect in her chair, and tried to rise.

"Doctor, if you could look down into the gray ruins of my heart, you would not reprove me so harshly. My whole being seems in some cold eclipse, and my soul is like the Sistine Chapel in Passion-week, where all is shrouded in shadow, and no sounds are heard but Miserere and Tenebræ."

"Promise me that in future you will try to keep it like that Christian temple, pure and inviolate from all imprecations and rebellious words. If gloom there must be, see to it that resignation seals your lips. What are you trying to do? You are not strong enough to walk alone."

"I want to go into the parlor, — I want my piano. Yesterday I attempted to cross the room, and only Katie's presence saved me from a severe fall."

She stood by her chair, grasping the carved back, and Dr. Grey stepped forward, and drew her arm under his.

In her great weakness she leaned upon him, and when they reached the parlor door, she paused and almost panted.

"You must not attempt to play, — you are too feeble even to sit up longer. Let me take you back to your room."

"No, — no! Let me alone. I know best what is good for me; and I tell you my piano is my only Paraclete."

Holding his arm for support, she drew a chair instead of the piano-stool to the instrument, and seated herself.

Dr. Grey raised the lid, and waited some seconds, expecting her to play, but she sat still and mute, and presently he stooped to catch a glimpse of her countenance.

"I want to see Elsie's grave. Open the blinds."

He threw open the shutters, and came back to the piano.

Through the window, the group of deodars was visible, and there, bathed in the mild yellow sunshine was the mound, and the faded wreath swinging in the breeze.

For many minutes Mrs. Gerome gazed at the quiet spot

Digitized by Google

where her nurse rested, and with her eyes still on the grave, her fingers struck into Chopin's Funeral March.

After a while, Dr. Grey noticed a slight quiver cross her pale lips, and when the mournful music reached its saddest chords, a mist veiled the steely eyes, and very soon tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

The march ended, she did not pause, but began Mozart's Requiem, and all the while that slow rain of tears dripped down on her white fingers, and splashed upon the ivory keys.

Dr. Grey was so rejoiced at the breaking up of the ice that had long frozen the fountain of her tears, that he made no attempt to interrupt her, until he saw that she tottered in her chair. Taking her hands from the piano, he said gently, —

"You are quite exhausted, and I can not permit this to continue. Come back to your room."

"No; let me stay here. Put me on the sofa in the oriel, and leave the blinds open."

He lifted her from the chair and led her to the sofa, where she sank heavily down upon the cushions.

Without comment or resistance, she drank a glass of strong cordial which he held to her lips, and lay with her eyes closed, while tears still trickled through the long jet lashes.

She wore a robe of white merino, and a rich blue shawl of the same soft material which was folded across her shoulders, made the wan face look like some marble seraph's, hovering over an altar where violet light streams through stained glass.

For some time Dr. Grey walked up and down the long room, glancing now and then at his patient, and when he saw that the tears had ceased, he brought from a basket in the hall an exquisitely beautiful and fragrant bouquet of the flowers which he knew she loved best, — heliotrope, violets, tube-rose, and Grand-Duke jessamine, fringed daintily with spicy geranium leaves, and scarlet fuchsias.

Silently he placed it on her folded hands, and the expression of surprise and pleasure that suddenly lighted her countenance, amply repaid him.

"Dr. Grey, it has been my wish to except services from no

Digitized by Google

one, — to owe no human being thanks; but your unvarying kindness to my poor Elsie and to me, imposes a debt of gratitude that I can not easily liquidate. I fear you are destined to bankrupt me, for how can I hope to repay all your thoughtful, delicate care, and generous interest in a stranger? Tell me in what way I can adequately requite you."

Dr. Grey drew a chair close to the sofa, and answered, —

"Take care lest your zeal prove the contrary, for you know a distinguished philosopher asserts that, 'Too great eagerness to requite an obligation is a species of ingratitude;' and such an accusation would be unflattering to you, and unpleasant to me."

Turning the bouquet around in order to examine and admire each flower, Mrs. Gerome toyed with the velvet bells, and said, sorrowfully, —

"Their delicious perfume always reminds me of my beautiful home near Funchal, where heliotrope and geraniums grew so tall that they looked in at my window, and hedges of fuchsias bordered my garden walks. Never have I seen elsewhere such profusion and perfection of flowers."

"When were you in Madeira?"

"Two years ago. The villa I occupied was situated on the side of a mountain, whose base was covered with vineyards; and from a grove of lemon and oleanders that stood in front of the house I could see the surging Atlantic at my feet, and the crest of the mountain clothed with chestnuts, high above and behind me. In one corner of my vineyard stood a solitary palm, which tradition asserted was planted when Zarco discovered the island; and the groves of orange, citron, and pomegranate trees were always peopled with humming-birds, and flocks of green canaries. There, surrounded by grand and picturesque scenery of which I never wearied, I resolved to live and die; but Elsie's desire to return to America, which held the ashes of her husband and child, overruled my inclination and the dictates of judgment, and reluctantly I left my mountain Eden and came here. Now, when I smell violets and heliotrope, regret mingles with their aroma; and, after all, the sacrifice was

Digitized by Google

in vain, and Elsie would have slept as calmly there, under palm and chestnut, as yonder, where the deodar-shadows fall."

"Is your life here a faithful transcript of that portion of it passed at Funchal?"

"Yes; except that there I saw no human being but the servants, who transacted any business that demanded interviews with the consul."

"It was fortunate that Elsie's wise counsel prevailed over your caprice, for many of your griefs proceed from the complete isolation to which you so strangely doom yourself; and until you become a useful member of that society you are so fully fitted to adorn and elevate, you need not hope or expect the peace of mind that results only from the consciousness of having nobly discharged the sacred obligations to God, and to your race. 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' was the solemn admonition of Him who sublimely bore the burdens of an entire world. Now tell me, have you ever stretched out a finger to aid the toiling multitudes whose cry for help wails over even the most prosperous lands? What have you done to strengthen trembling hands, or comfort and gladden oppressed hearts? How dare you hoard within your own home the treasure of fortune, talent, and sympathy, which were temporarily entrusted to your hands, to be sown broadcast in noble charities,—to be judiciously invested in promoting the cause of Truth in the fierce war Evil wages against it? Hitherto you have lived solely for yourself, which is a sin against humanity; and have pampered a morbid and rebellious spirit, that is a grievous sin against your God. Shake off your lethargy and cynicism, and let a busy future redeem a vagrant and worthless past. '*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*'"

The flowers dropped on her bosom, and, clasping her hands across her forehead, she turned her face towards the sea, and seemed pondering his words.

"Dr. Grey, my purse has always been open to the needy, and Elsie was my almoner Whenever you find a destitute family,

Digitized by Google

or hear an appeal for help, I shall gladly respond, and constitute you the agent for the distribution of my charity-fund. As for bearing the sorrows of others, pray excuse me. I am so weighed down with my own burdens that I have no strength or leisure to spare to my neighbors, and since I ask no aid, must not be censured for rendering none. It is utterly useless to urge me to enter society, for like that sad pilgrim in Brittany, 'In losing solitude I lose the half of my soul. I go out into the world with a secret horror. When I withdraw, I gather together and lock up my scattered treasure, but I put away my ideas sorely handled, like fruits fallen from the tree upon stones.' No no; in seclusion I find the only modicum of peace that earth can ever yield me, and can readily understand why Chateaubriand avoided those crowds which he denominated, 'The vast desert of men.'"

"You must not be offended, if, in reply, I remind you of the rude but vigorous words of that prince of cynics, Schopenhauer, 'Society is a fire at which the wise man from a prudent distance warms himself; not plunging into it, like the fool who after getting well blistered, rushes into the coldness of solitude, and complains that the fire burns.' Of the two evils, reckless dissipation and gloomy isolation, the latter is probably an economy of sin; but since neither is inevitable, we should all endeavor to render ourselves useful members of society, and unfurl over our circle the banner of St. Paul, 'Use this world as not abusing it.' Mrs. Gerome, do not obstinately mar the present and future, by brooding bitterly over the trials of the past; but try to believe that, indeed, —

> . . . . 'Sorrows humanise our race;
> Tears are the showers that fertilize this world,
> And memory of things precious keepeth warm
> The heart that once did hold them.'"

He watched her eagerly yet gravely, hoping that her face would soften; but she raised her hand with a proud, impatient motion.

"You talk at random, concerning matters of which you

Digitized by Google

know nothing. I hate the world and have abjured it, and you might as well go down yonder and harangue the ocean on the sin of its ceaseless muttering, as expect to remodel my aimless, blank life."

Pained and disappointed, he remained silent, and, as if conscious of a want of courtesy, she added, —

"Do not allow your generous heart to be disquieted on my account, but leave me to a fate which can not be changed, — which I have endured seven years, and must bear to my grave Now that you see how desolate I am, pity me, and be silent."

"It will be difficult for you to regain your strength here, where so many mournful associations surround you, and I came to-day to beg you to take a trip somewhere, by sea or land. Almost any change of scene and air will materially benefit you, and you need not be absent more than a few weeks. Will you take the matter under consideration?"

"No, sir; why should I? Can hills or waves, dells or lakes, cure a mind which you assure me is diseased? Can sea breeze or mountain air fan out recollections that have jaundiced the heart, or furnish an opiate that will effectually deaden and quiet regret? I long ago tried your remedy — travelling, and for four years I wandered up and down, and over the face of the old world; but amid the crumbling columns of Persepolis, I was still Agla Gerome, the wretched; and when I stood on the margin of the Lake of Wan, I saw in its waves the reflection of the same hopeless woman who now lies before you. Change of external surroundings is futile, and no more affects the soul than the roar of surface-surf changes the hollows of an ocean bed where the dead sleep; and, verily, —

'My heart is a drear Golgotha, where all the ground is white
With the wrecks of joys that have perished, — the skeletons of delight.'"

He saw that in her present mood expostulation would only aggravate the evil he longed to correct, and hoping to divert the current of her thoughts, he said, —

"I trust you will not deem me impertinently curious if I ask what singular freak bestowed upon you the name of 'Agla'?"

Digitized by Google

A startling change swept over her features, and her tone was haughtily challenging.

"What interest can Dr. Grey find in a matter so trivial? If I were named Hecate or Persephone, would the world have a right to demur, to complain, or to criticise?"

"When a lady bears the mystic name, which, in past ages, was given to the Deity, by a race who, if superstitious, were at least devout and reverent, she should not be surprised if it excites wonder and comment. Forgive me, however, if my inquiry annoyed you."

He rose and took his hat, but her hand caught his arm.

"Do you know the import of the word?"

"Yes; I understand the significance of the letters, and the wonderful power attributed to them when arranged in the triangles and called the 'Shield of David.' Knowing that it was considered talismanic, I could not imagine why you were christened with so mystical a name."

"I was never christened."

He could not explain the confusion and displeasure which the question excited, and anxious to relieve her of any feeling of annoyance, he added,—

"Have you ever looked into the nature of the *Aglaophotis?*"

She struggled up from her cushions, and exclaimed, with a vehemence that startled him,—

"What induced you to examine it? I know that it is a strange plant, growing out of solid marble, and accounted a charm by Arab magicians. Well, Dr. Grey, do not I belong to that species? You see before you a human specimen of *Aglaophotis*, growing out of a marble heart."

Sometimes an exaggerated whimsicality trenches so closely upon insanity, that it is difficult to discriminate between them; and, as Dr. Grey noted the peculiarly cold glitter of her large eyes, and the restless movement of her usually quiet hands, he dreaded that the crushing weight on her heart would ultimately impair her mind. Now he abruptly changed the topic.

"Mrs. Gerome, whenever it is agreeable to you to drive down the beach, or across the woods and among the hills, it will

Digitized by Google

afford me much pleasure to place my horse, buggy, and myself at your disposal; and, in fine weather like this, a drive of a few miles would invigorate you."

"Thank you. I shall not trouble you, for I have my low swung easy carriage, and my grays — my fatal grays. Ah! if they would only serve me as they did my poor Elsie! When I am strong enough to take the reins, I will allow them an opportunity. Dr. Grey, if I seem rude, forgive me. You are very kind and singularly patient, and sometimes when you have left me, I feel ashamed of my inability to prove my sincere appreciation of your goodness. For these beautiful flowers, I thank you cordially."

She held out her hand, and, as he accepted it, he drew from his pocket the silver key which he had so carefully preserved.

"Accident made me the custodian of this key, which I found on the floor the day of Elsie's burial. Knowing that it belonged to your escritoire, whence I saw you take it, I thought it best not to commit it to a servant's care, and have kept it in my pocket until I thought you might need it."

Although the room was growing dim, he detected the expression of dread that crossed her countenance, and saw her bite her thin lip with vexation.

"You have worn for one month the key of my desk, where lie all my papers and records; and when I was so desperately ill, I presume you looked into the drawers, merely to ascertain whether I had prepared my will?"

The mockery of her tone stung him keenly, but he allowed no evidence of the wound to escape him. Bending over her as she sat partially erect, supported by cushions, he took her white face tenderly in his hands, and said, very calmly and gently, —

"When you know me better, you will realize how groundless is your apprehension that I have penetrated into the recesses of your writing-desk. Knowing that it contained valuable papers, I guarded it as jealously as you could have done; and, upon the honor of a gentleman, I assure you I am as ignorant of its contents as if I had never entered the house. When I consider it essential to my peace of mind to become acquainted with your

Digitized by Google

antecedents, I shall come to you and ask what I desire to learn. While you were so ill, I told Robert that your friends should be notified of your imminent danger, and inquired of him whether you had made a will, as I deemed it my duty to inform your agent of your alarming condition. He either could not or would not give me any satisfactory reply, and there the matter ended. When I am gone, do not reproach yourself for having so unjustly impugned my motives, for I shall not allow myself to believe that you really entertain so contemptible an opinion of me; and shall ascribe your hasty accusation to mere momentary chagrin and pique."

"Ah, sir! you ought not to wonder that I am so suspicious; you — but how can you understand the grounds of my distrust, unless — "

"Hush! We will not discuss a matter which can only excite and annoy you. Mrs. Gerome, under all circumstances you may unhesitatingly trust me, and I beg to assure you I shall never divulge anything confided to me. You need a friend, and perhaps some day you may consider me worthy to serve you in that capacity; meantime, as your physician, I shall continue to watch over and control you. To-day you have cruelly overtasked your exhausted system, and I can not permit you to remain here any longer. Come immediately to your own room."

His manner was so quietly authoritative that she obeyed instantly, and when he lifted her from the sofa, she took his arm, and walked towards the door. Before they had crossed the hall, he felt her reel and lean more heavily against him, and silently he took the thin form in his arms, and carried her to her room.

The gray head was on his shoulder, and the cold marble cheek touched his, as he laid her softly down on her bed and arranged her pillows. He rang for Katie, and, in crossing the floor, stepped on something hard. It was too dusky in the closely curtained apartment to see any object so small, but he swept his hand across the carpet and picked up the key that had slipped from her nerveless fingers. Placing it beside her, he smiled and said, —

"You are incorrigibly careless. Are you not afraid to tax

Digitized by Google

my curiosity so severely, and tempt me so pertinaciously, by strewing your keys in my path? The next time I pick up this one, which belongs to your escritoire, I shall engage some one to act as your guardian. Katie, be sure she takes that tonic mixture three times a day. Good-night."

When the sound of his retreating footsteps died away, Mrs Gerome thrust the key under her pillow, and murmured,—

"I wonder whether this Ulpian can be as true, as trusty, as nobly fearless as his grand old Roman namesake, whom not even the purple of Severus could save from martyrdom? Ah! if Ulpian Grey is really all that he appears. But how dare I hope, much less believe it? Verily, he reminds me of Madame de Chatenay's description of Joubert, 'He seems to be a soul that by accident had met with a body, and tried to make the best of it.'"

"Did you speak to me, ma'am?" asked Katie, who was bustling about, preparing to light the lamp.

"No. The room is like a tomb. Open the blinds and loop back all the curtains, so that I can look out."

> "And the sunset paled, and warmed once more
> With a softer, tenderer after-glow;
> In the east was moon-rise, with boats off-shore
> And sails in the distance drifting slow."

CHAPTER XXV.

"DOCTOR GREY, sister says she wants to see you, before you go to town."

Jessie Owen came softly up to the table where Dr. Grey sat writing, and stood with her hand on his knee.

"Very well. Tell sister I will come to her as soon as I finish this letter. Where is she?"

"In the library."

Digitized by Google

"In ten minutes I shall be at leisure."

He found Salome with a piece of sewing in her hand, and her young sister leaning on her lap, chattering merrily about a nest full of eggs which she and Stanley had found that morning in a corner of the orchard; while the latter swung on the back of her chair, winding over his finger a short curl that lay on her neck. It was a pleasant, peaceful, homelike picture, worthy of Eastman Johnson's brush, and for thirty years such a group had not been seen in that quiet old library.

Dr. Grey paused at the threshold, to admire the graceful pose of Jessie's fairy figure, — the lazy nonchalance of Stanley's posture, — and the finely shaped head that rose above both, like some stately lily, surrounded by clustering croci; but Salome was listening for his footsteps, and turned her head at his entrance.

"Stanley, take Jessie up to my room, and show her your Chinese puzzle. When I want either or both of you, I will call you. Close the door after you, and mind that you do not get to romping, and shake the house down."

"How very pretty Jessie has grown during the last year. Her complexion has lost its muddy tinge, and is almost waxen," said the doctor, when the children had left the room and scampered up stairs.

"She is a very sweet-tempered and affectionate little thing, but I never considered her pretty. She is too much like her father."

"Salome, death veils all blemishes."

"That depends very much on the character of the survivors; but we will not discuss abstract propositions, — especially since I have resolved to follow the old oriental maxim, —

> 'Leave ancestry behind, despise heraldic art,
> Thy father be thy mind, thy mother be thy heart.
> Dead names concern not thee, bid foreign titles wait;
> Thy deeds thy pedigree, thy hopes thy rich estate!'

Dr. Grey, the week has ended, and I took the liberty of remind

Digitized by Google

ing you of the fact, as I am anxious to acquaint you with my purposes for the future."

He drew a chair near hers, and seated himself.

"Well, Salome, I hope that reflection has changed your views, and taught you the wisdom of my sister's course with reference to yourself."

"On the contrary, the season of deliberation you forced upon me has only strengthened and intensified my desire to carry into execution the project I have so long dreamed of; and to-day I am more than ever firmly resolved to follow, at all hazards, the dictates of my own judgment, no matter with whose opinions or wishes they may conflict."

She expected that he would expostulate, and plead against her decision, but he merely bowed, and remained silent.

"My object in asking this interview was to ascertain how soon it would be convenient for you to place in my hands the legacy of one thousand dollars which was bequeathed to me on condition that I went upon the stage; and also to inquire what you intend to do with the children, of whom Miss Jane's will constitutes you the guardian?"

"You wish me to understand that you are determined to defy the wishes of your best friend, and take a step which distressed her beyond expression?"

"I shall certainly go upon the stage."

"I have no alternative but to accept your decision, which you are well aware I regard as exceedingly deplorable. The money can be paid to you to-morrow, if you desire it. Hoping that you would abandon this freak, I had intended to keep the children here, under your supervision, while I removed to my house in town, and left their tuition to Miss Dexter; but since you have decided otherwise, I shall remain here for the present, keeping them with me, at least until after Muriel's marriage. The income from this farm averages two thousand dollars a year, and will not only amply provide for their wants and education, but will enable me to lay aside annually a portion of that amount. When Muriel marries, Miss Dexter may not be willing to remain here, and if she leaves us I shall endeavor to find as worthy a

Digitized by Google

reliable a substitute. Have you any objection to this arrangement?"

"I have no right to utter any, since you are the legal guardian of the children. But contingencies might arise for which it seems you have not provided."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can trust Jessie and Stanley to you, but when you are married I prefer that they should find another home; or, if need be, Jessie can come to me."

An angry flush dyed Dr. Grey's olive face, and kindled a fiery gleam in his usually mild, clear, blue eyes, but looking at the girl's compressed and trembling lips, and noting the underlying misery which her defiant expression could not cover, his displeasure gave place to profound compassion.

"Salome, dismiss that cause of anxiety from your mind, and trust the assurance I offer you now, — that when I marry, my wife will be worthy to assist me in guiding and governing my wards."

She was prepared to hear him retort that the career she had chosen would render her an unsuitable counsellor for little Jessie; and conscious that she had deeply wounded him, his calm reply was the sharpest rebuke he could possibly have administered.

"Dr. Grey, I have no extraordinary amount of tenderness for the children, because they are indissolubly associated with that period of my life to which I never recur without pain and humiliation that you can not possibly realize or comprehend; still, I am not exactly a brute, and I do not wish them to be trained to regard me as a Pariah, or to be told that I have forfeited their respect and affection. When I am gone, let them think kindly of me."

"Your request is a reflection upon my friendship, and is so exceedingly unjust that I am surprised and pained; but let that pass. I am sure I need not tell you that your wishes shall be complied with. I have often thought that after Stanley completed his studies, I would take him into my office, and teach him my own profession. Have you any objection to this scheme?"

Digitized by Google

"No, sir. I am willing to trust him implicitly to you. He has one terrible fault which I have been trying to correct, and which I hope you will not lose sight of. The boy seems constitutionally addicted to telling stories, and prefers falsehood to truth. I have punished him repeatedly for this habit, and you must, if possible, save him from the pauper vice of lying, which is peculiarly detestable to me. I know less of the little one's character, but believe that she is not afflicted with this evil tendency."

"Stanley's fault has not escaped me, and two days ago I was obliged to punish him for a gross violation of the truth; but as he grows older, I trust he will correct this defect, and I shall faithfully endeavor to show him its enormity. Is there anything else you wish to say to me about the children? I will very gladly hear any suggestions you can offer."

"No, sir. I have governed myself so badly, that it ill becomes me to dictate to you how they should be trained. God knows, I am heartily glad they were mercifully thrown into your hands; and if you can only make Stanley Owen such a man as you are, the old blot on the name may be effaced. From Mark and Joel I have not heard for several months, and presume they will be sturdy but unlettered mechanics. If I succeed, I shall interfere and send them to school; otherwise, they must take the chances for letters and a livelihood."

"Salome, you are bartering life-long peace and happiness for the momentary gratification of a whim, prompted solely by vanity. How worthless are the brief hollow plaudits of the world (which will regard you merely as the toy of an hour), in comparison with the affection and society of your own family? Here, in your home, how useful, how contented you might be!"

Her only reply was a hasty, imperious wave of the hand, and a long silence followed.

In the bright morning light that streamed in through the tendrils of honeysuckle clambering around the window, Dr. Grey looked searchingly at the orphan, and could scarcely

Digitized by Google

realize that this pale, proud, pain-stricken face, was the same rosy round one, fair and fearless, that had first met his gaze under the pearly apple-blossoms.

Then, pink flesh, hazel eyes, vermilioned lips, and glossy hair had preferred incontestable claims to beauty; now, an artist would have curiously traced the fine lines and curves daintily drawn about eyes, brow, and mouth, by the stylus of care, of hopelessness, of wild bursts of passion. Her figure retained its rounded symmetry, but the countenance traitorously revealed the struggles, the bitter disappointments, the vindictive jealousy, and rudely-smitten and blasted hopes, that had robbed her days of peace and her nights of sleep.

Until this moment, Dr. Grey had not fully appreciated the change that had been wrought by two tedious years, and as he scrutinized the sadly sharpened and shadowed features, a painful feeling of humiliation and almost of self-reproach sprang from the consciousness that his inability to reciprocate her devoted love had brought down this premature blight upon a young and whilom happy, careless girl, — transforming her into a reckless, hardened, hopeless woman.

While his inexorable conscience fully exonerated him from censure, his generous heart ached in sympathy for hers, and his chivalric tenderness for all things weaker than himself, bled at the reflection that he had been unintentionally instrumental in darkening a woman's life.

But hope, — beautiful, blue-eyed, sunny-browed hope, — whispered that this was a fleeting youthful fancy; and that absence and time would dispel the temporary gloom that now lay on her heart, like some dense cold vapor which would grow silvery, and melt in morning sunshine.

Under his steady gaze the blood rose slowly to its old signal-station on her cheeks, and she put up one hand to shield its scarlet banners.

"Salome, will you tell me when and where you intend to go? Since you have resolved to leave us, I desire to know in what way I can aid you, or contribute to the comfort of the journey you contemplate."

Digitized by Google

"From the last letter of Professor V——, declining your proposal that he should come here and instruct me, I learn that within the ensuing ten days he will sail for Havre, *en route* to Italy, where he intends spending the winter. If possible, I wish to reach New York before his departure, and to accompany him. The thousand dollars will defray my expenses until I have completed my musical training, which will fit me for the stage, and insure an early engagement in some operatic company. Knowing your high estimate of Professor V——, both as a gentleman and as a musician, I am exceedingly anxious to place myself under his protection; especially since his wife and children will meet him at Paris, and go on to Naples. Are you willing to give me a letter of introduction, commending me to his favorable consideration?"

The hesitating timidity with which this request was uttered, touched him more painfully than aught that had ever passed between them.

"My dear child, did you suppose that I would permit you to travel alone to New York, and thrust yourself upon the notice of strangers? I will accompany you whenever you go, and not only present you to the professor, but request him to receive you into his family as a member of his home-circle."

A quiver shook out the hard lines around her lips, and she turned her eyes full on his.

"You are very kind, sir, but that is not necessary; and a letter of introduction will have the same effect, and save you from a disagreeable trip. Your time is too valuable to be wasted on such journeys, and I have no right to expect that solely on my account you should tear yourself away — from — those dear to you."

"I think my time could not be more profitably employed than in promoting the happiness and welfare of my adopted sister, who was so inexpressibly dear to my noble Janet. It is neither pleasant nor proper for a young lady to travel without an escort."

He had risen, and laid his hand lightly on the back of her chair.

Digitized by Google

"She smiled; but he could see arise
Her soul from far adown her eyes,
Prepared as if for sacrifice."

"Is it a mercy, think you, Dr. Grey, to foster a fastidiousness that can only barb the shafts of penury? What right have toiling paupers to harbor in their thoughts those dainty scruples that belong appropriately to princesses and palaces? Why tell me that this, that, or the other step is not 'proper,' when you know that necessity goads me? Sir, I feel now like that isolated Florentine, and echo her words, —

'And since help
Must come to me from those who love me not,
Farewell, all helpers. I must help myself,
And am alone from henceforth."

"You prefer that I should not accompany you to New York?"

"Yes, sir; but I gratefully accept a letter to Professor V——."

"Very well; it shall be in readiness when you wish it. Have you fixed any time for your departure?"

"This is Friday, — and I shall go on the six o'clock train, Monday morning."

"Is there any service that I can render you in the interim?"

"No, thank you."

"As you have no likeness of the children, would it be agreeable to you to have their photographs taken to-day, — and, at the same time, a picture of yourself to be left with them? If you desire it I will meet you in town, at the gallery, at any hour you may designate."

Standing before him, she answered, almost scornfully, —

"I shall not have time. Some day — if I succeed — I will send them my photograph, taken in gorgeous robes as *prima donna;* provided you promise that said robes shall not constitute a *San Benito*, and doom the picture to the flames. I will detain you no longer, Dr. Grey, as the sole object of the interview has been accomplished."

Digitized by Google

"Pardon me; but I have a word to say. Your career will probably be brilliantly successful, in which event you will feel no want of admirers and friends, — and will doubtless ignore me for those who flatter you more, and really love you less. But, Salome, failure may overtake you, bringing in its train countless evils that at present you can not realize, — poverty, disease, desolation, in the midst of strangers, — and all the woes that, like hungry wolves, attack homeless, isolated women. I earnestly hope that the leprous hand of disaster and defeat may never be laid upon your future, but the most cautious human schemes are fallible — often futile — and if you should be unsuccessful in your programme, and find yourself unable to consummate your plans, I ask you now, by the memory of our friendship, by the sacred memory of the dead, to promise me that you will immediately write and acquaint me with all your needs, your wishes, your real condition. Promise me, dear Salome, that you will turn instantly to me, as you would to Stanley, were he in my place, — that you will let me prove myself your elder brother, — your truest, best friend."

He put his hand on her head, but she recoiled haughtily from his touch.

"Dr. Grey, I promise you,

> 'I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
> Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass.'

I promise you that if misfortune, failure, and penury lay hold of me, you shall be the last human being who will learn it; for I will cloak myself under a name that will not betray me, and crawl into some lazaretto, and be buried in some potter's field, among other mendicants, — unknown, 'unwept, unhonored, and unsung.'"

If some motherless young chamois, rescued from destruction, and pampered and caressed, had suddenly turned, and savagely bitten and lacerated the hand that fondled and fed it, Dr. Grey would not have been more painfully startled; but experience had taught him the uselessness of expostulation during her

Digitized by Google

moods of perversity, and he took his hat and turned away, saying, almost sternly, —

"Bear in mind that neither palace nor potter's field can screen you from the scrutiny of your Maker, or mask and shelter your shivering soul in the solemn hour when He demands its last reckoning."

"Which 'reckoning,' your eminently Christian charity assures you will prove more terrible for me than the Bloody Assizes. 'By the memory of our friendship!' Oh, shallow sham! Pinning my faith to the *dictum*, 'The tide of friendship does not rise high on the bank of perfection,' my fatuity led me to expect that your friendship was wide as the universe, and lasting as eternity. Wise Helvetius told me that, 'To be loved, we should merit but little esteem; all superiority attracts awe and aversion;' *ergo*, since my credentials of unworthiness were in disputable, I laid claim to a vast share of your favor. But, alas! the logic of the seers is well-nigh as hollow as my hopes."

He looked over his shoulder at her, with an expression of pity as profound as that which must have filled the eyes of the angel, who, standing in the blaze of the sword of wrath, watched Adam and Eve go mournfully forth into the blistering heats of unknown lands. Before he could reply, she laughed contemptuously, and continued, —

"*Nil desperandum*, Dr. Grey. Remember that, 'Faith and persistency are life's architects; while doubt and despair bury all under the ruins of any endeavor.' When I have trilled a fortune into that abhorred vacuum, my pocket, I shall go down to the Tigris, and catch the mate to Tobias' fish, and by the cremation thereof, fumigate my pestiferous soul, and smoke out the Asmodeus that has so long and comfortably dwelt there."

"God grant you a Raphael, as guide on your journey," was his calm, earnest reply, as he disappeared, closing the door after him.

When the sound of his buggy-wheels on the gravelled avenue

Digitized by Google

told her he had gone, she threw herself on the floor, and crossing her arms on a chair, hid her face in them.

During Saturday, no opportunity presented itself for renewing the conversation, and early on Sunday morning Dr. Grey sent to her room a package marked $1,000.00 — though really containing $1,500.00 — and a letter addressed to Professor V——. Without examining either, she threw them into her trunk, which was already packed, and went down to breakfast.

She declined accompanying Miss Dexter and Muriel to church, alleging, as an excuse, that it was the last day she could spend with the children.

Dr. Grey approached her when the remainder of the family had left the table, where she sat abstractedly jingling her fork and spoon.

He noticed that her breakfast was untasted, and said, very gently, —

"I suppose that you wish to visit our dear Jane's grave, before you leave us, and, if agreeable to you, I shall be glad to have you accompany me there to-day."

"Thank you; but if I go, it will be alone."

He stooped to kiss Jessie, who leaned against her sister's chair, and, when he left the room, Salome caught the child in her arms, and pressed her lips twice to the spot where his had rested.

Late in the afternoon she eluded the children's watchful eyes, and stole away from the house, taking the road that led towards "Solitude." In one portion of the osage hedge that surrounded the place, the lower branches had died, leaving a small opening, and here Salome gained access to the grounds. Walking cautiously under the thick and dark masses of shrubbery and trees, she reached the arched path near the clump of pyramidal deodars, whose long, drooping plumes were fluttering in the evening wind.

Thence she could command a view of the house and grounds in front, and thence she saw that concerning which she had come to satisfy herself, — believing that the evidence of her own

Digitized by Google

eyes would fortify her for the approaching trial of separation. Dr. Grey's horse and buggy stood near the side gate, and Dr. Grey was walking very slowly up and down the avenue leading to the beach, while Mrs. Gerome's tall form leaned on his arm, and the greyhound followed sulkily.

Salome had barely time to look upon the spectacle that fired her heart and well-nigh maddened her, ere the dog lifted his head, gave one quick, savage bark, and darted in the direction of the cedars.

Dread of detection and of Dr. Grey's pitying gaze was more potent than fear of the brute, and she ran swiftly towards the gap in the hedge, by which she had effected an entrance into the secluded grounds. Just as she reached it, the greyhound bounded up, and they met in front of the opening. He set his teeth in her clothes, tearing away a streamer of her black dress, and, as she silently struggled, he bit her arm badly, mangling the flesh, from which the blood spouted. Disengaging a shawl which she wore around her shoulders, she threw it over his head, and, as the meshes caught in his collar, and temporarily entangled him, she sprang through the gap, and seized a heavy stick which lay within reach. He followed, snarling and pawing at the shawl that ultimately dropped at Salome's feet; but finding himself beyond the boundary he was expected to guard, and probably satisfied with the punishment already inflicted, he retreated before a well-aimed blow that drove him back into the enclosure.

The instant he started towards the cedars Dr. Grey suspected mischief, and, placing Mrs. Gerome on a bench that surrounded an elm, he hurried in the same direction.

When he reached the spot, the dog was snuffing at a patch of pombazine that lay on the grass; and, confirmed in his sad suspicion, the doctor passed through the opening in the hedge and looked about for the figure which he dreaded, yet expected to see.

Bushy undergrowth covered the ground for some distance, and, hoping that nothing more serious than fright had resulted

Digitized by Google

from the escapade, he stowed away the bombazine fragment in his coat pocket, and slowly retraced his steps.

Secreted by two friendly oaks that spread their low boughs over her, Salome had seen his anxious face peering around for the intruder, and when he abandoned the search and disappeared, she smothered a bitter laugh, and strove to stanch the blood that trickled from the gash by binding her handkerchief over it. Torn muscles and tendons ached and smarted; but the great agony that seemed devouring her heart rendered her almost oblivious of physical pain. In the dusk of coming night she crossed the gloomy forest, where a whippoorwill was drearily lamenting, and, walking over an unfrequented portion of the lawn, went up to her own room.

She bathed and bound up the wound as securely as the use of only one hand would permit, and put on a dress whose sleeves fastened closely at the wrist.

Ere long, Dr. Grey's clear voice echoed through the hall, and the sound made her wince, like the touch of some glowing brand.

"Jessie, where is sister Salome? Tell her tea is ready."

The orphan went down and took her seat, but did not even glance at the master of the house, who looked anxiously at her as she entered.

During the meal Jessie asked for some sweetmeats that were placed in front of her sister, and, as the latter drew the glass dish nearer, and proceeded to help her, the child exclaimed,—

"Oh, look there! What is that dripping from your sleeve? Ugh! it is blood."

"Nonsense, Jessie! don't be silly. Hush! and eat your supper."

Two drops of blood had fallen on the table-cloth, and the girl instantly set her cup and saucer over them.

She felt the slow stream trickling down to her wrist, and put her arm in her lap.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Dr. Grey, who had observed the quick movement.

Digitized by Google

"I hurt my arm a little, that is all."

Her tone forbade a renewal of inquiry, and, as soon as possible, she withdrew to her room, to adjust the bandage.

The children were playing in the library, and Muriel was walking with her governess on the wide piazza.

While Salome was trying by the aid of fingers and teeth to draw a strip of linen tightly over her wound, a tap at the door startled her.

"I am engaged, and can see no one just now."

"Salome, I want to speak to you, and shall wait here until I do."

"Excuse me, Dr. Grey. I will come down in ten minutes."

"Pardon me, but I insist upon seeing you here, and hope you will not compel me to force the door open."

She wrapped a towel around her arm, drew down her sleeve, and opened the door.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this interview?"

"To my interest in your welfare, which cannot be baffled. Salome, what is the matter? You looked so pale that I noticed you particularly, and saw the blood on the table-cloth. My dear child, I will not be trifled with. Tell me where you are hurt."

"Pray give yourself no uneasiness. I merely scraped and bruised my arm. It is a matter of no consequence."

"Of that I beg to be considered the best judge. Show me your arm."

"I prefer not to trouble you."

He gently but firmly took hold of it, unwound the towel, and she saw him start and shudder at sight of the mangled flesh.

"An ugly gash! Tell me how you hurt yourself so severely."

"It is a matter that I do not choose to discuss; but since you have seen it, I wish you would be so good as to dress and bandage the wound."

"Oh, my little sister! Will you never learn to trust your brother?"

"Oh, Dr. Grey! will you never learn to let me alone, when

Digitized by Google

I am indulging the 'Imp of the Perverse' in an audience, and do not wish to be interrupted?"

She mimicked his pleading tone so admirably that his face flushed.

"Come to the sitting-room. No one can disturb us there, and I will attend to your injury, which is really serious."

She followed him, and stood without flinching one iota, while he clipped away the jagged pieces of flesh, covered the long gash with adhesive plaster, and carefully bandaged the whole.

"Salome, you must dismiss all idea of starting to-morrow, for indeed it would not be safe for you to travel alone, with your arm in this condition. It may give you much trouble and suffering."

"Which, of course, *nolens volens*, I must bear as best I may; but, so surely as I live to see daylight, I shall start, even if I knew I should have to stop *en route* and bury my pretty arm, and be forced to buy a cork one, wherewith to gesticulate gracefully when I die as 'Azucena.' There! thank you, Dr. Grey; of course you are very good, — you always are. Shall I bid you all good-by now, or wait till morning? Better make my adieu to-night, so that I may not disturb the matutinal slumbers of the household."

There was a dangerous, starry sparkle in her eyes, that he would not venture to defy, and, sighing heavily, he answered, —

"I shall accompany you to the depôt, and place you under the protection of the conductor."

"I do not desire to give you that trouble, and —"

"Hush! Do not grieve me any more than you have already done, by your hasty, unkind, unfriendly speeches. I shall see ou in the morning."

He left the room abruptly, to conceal the distress which he did not desire her to discover; and having found Muriel and Miss Dexter, Salome bade them good-by, requested them not to disturb themselves next morning on her account, and called the children to her room.

Digitized by Google

For two hours they sat beside her on the lounge, crying over her impending departure, but when she had promised to take them as far as the depôt, their thoughts followed other currents, and very soon after, both slumbered soundly in their trundle-bed.

With her cheek resting on her hand, Salome sat looking at them, noting the glossiness of their curling hair, the flush on their round faces, the regular breathing of peaceful childhood's sleep. Once she could have wept, and would have knelt and prayed over them; but now her own overmastering misery had withered all the tenderness in her heart, and, while her eyes of flesh rested on the orphans, her mental vision was filled with the figure of that gray-haired woman hanging on Dr. Grey's arm. In a dull, cold, abstract way, she hoped that the little ones would be happy, — how could they be otherwise when fortune had committed them to Dr. Grey's guardianship? But a numb, desperate feeling had seized her, and she cared for nothing, loved nothing, prayed for nothing.

How the hours of that night of wretchedness passed she never knew; but when the little bird in the parlor clock "cuckooed" three times, she was aroused from her reverie by the tramp of horses' hoofs on the gravel, and then the sharp clang of the bell echoed through the silent house.

It was not unusual for messengers to summon Dr. Grey during the night, and she was not surprised when, some moments later, she heard his voice in the hall. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour, his firm, well-known step approached and paused at her threshold.

"Salome, are you up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come into the passage."

She opened the door, and stood with the candle in her hand.

"I regret exceedingly that I am compelled to leave here immediately, as I must hasten to see a man and child who have been horribly burned and injured by the falling in of a roof. The parties live some distance in the country, and I fear I shall

Digitized by Google

not be able to get back in time to go with you to the cars. I shall drive as rapidly as possible, and hope to accompany you, but if I should be detained, here is a note which I hastily scribbled to Mr. Miller, the conductor, whom you will find a very kind and courteous gentleman. I sincerely deplore this summons, but the sufferers are old friends of my sister, and I hope you will believe that nothing but a case of life and death would prevent me from seeing you aboard the train."

"I am sorry, sir, that you thought it necessary to apologize."

She was not yet prepared to part from him forever, — she had been nerving herself for the final interview at the depôt; but now it came with a shock that utterly stunned her, and she reeled against the door-facing, as if recoiling from some fearful blow.

The livid pallor of her lips, and the spasm of agony that contracted her features, frightened him, and, as he sprang closer to her, the candle fell from her fingers. He caught it, ere it reached the mat, and placed it on a chair.

"My dear child, your arm pains you, and I beg you to defer your journey at least until Tuesday. I shall be anxious and miserable about you, if you go this morning, and, for my sake, Salome, if not for your own, remain here one day longer. I have not asked many things of you, and I trust you will not refuse this last request I may ever be allowed to make."

She attempted to speak, but there came only a quiver across her mouth, and a sickly smile that flickered over the ghastly proud face, like the dying sunshine of Indian summer on marble cenotaphs.

"Salome, you will, to oblige me, wait until Tuesday?"

She shook her head, and mastered her weakness.

"No, Dr. Grey; I must go at once. I take all the hazard."

"Then you will find on the mantel-piece in my room, a paper containing directions for the treatment of your arm, which demands care and attention. I am sorry you are so obstinate, and, if I possessed the authority, I would forbid your departure."

Digitized by Google

He could not endure the despairing expression of her eyes, which seemed supernaturally large and brilliant, and his own quailed, for the first time within his recollection. She knew that she was going away forever, to avoid the sight of his happiness with Mrs. Gerome; that, in comparison with that torture, all other trials, even separation, would be endurable; but the least evil was more severe than she had dreaded. Now, as she looked up at his noble face, overshadowed with anxiety and regret, and paler than she had ever seen it, the one prayer of her heart was, that, ere a wife's lips touched his, death might claim him for its prey.

"Salome, I am deeply pained by the course you persist in following, but I will not provoke and annoy you by renewed expression of a disapprobation that has proved so ineffectual in influencing your decision. God grant that the results may sanction your confidence in your own judgment, — your distrust of mine. I promised you once that I would pray for you, and I wish to assure you, that, while I live, I shall never lay my head upon my pillow without having first committed you to the mercy and loving care of that Guardian who never 'slumbers, nor sleeps.' May God bless and guide you, my dear young friend, and if not again in this world, grant that we may meet in the Everlasting City of Peace. Little sister, be sure to meet me in the Kingdom of Rest, where dear Janet waits for us both."

His calm eyes filled with tears, and his voice grew tremulous, as he took Salome's cold, passive hand, and kissed it.

"Good-by, Dr. Grey; if I find my way to heaven, it will be because you are there. When I am gone, let my name and memory be like that of the dead."

She stood erect, with her fingers lying in his palm, and he ring of her voice was like the clashing of steel against steel.

He bent down, and, for the first time, pressed his lips to her forehead; then turned quickly and walked away. When he reached the head of the stairs, he looked back and saw her standing in the door, with the candle-light flaring over her face; and in after years, he could never recall, without a keen pang, that vision of a girlish form draped in mourning, and of fair,

Digitized by Google

rigid features, which hope and happiness could never again soften and brighten

Her splendid eyes followed him, as if the sole light of her life were passing away forever; and, with a heavy sigh, he hurried down the steps, realizing all the mournful burden of that Portuguese sonnet,—

"Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine,
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I HOPE nothing has gone wrong, Robert? You look unusually forlorn and doleful."

Dr. Grey stepped out of his buggy, and accosted the gardener, who was leaning idly on the gate, holding a trowel in his hand, and lazily puffing the smoke from his pipe.

"I thank you, sir; with us the world wags on pretty much the same, but when a man has been planting violets on his mother's grave he does not feel like whistling and making merry. Besides, to tell the truth,—which I do not like to shirk,—I am getting very tired of this dismal, unlucky place.

Digitized by Google

If I had known as much before I bought it as I do now, all the locomotives in America could not have dragged me here. I was a stranger, and of course nobody thought it their special duty to warn me; so I was bitten badly enough by the agent who sold me this den of misfortune. Now, when it is too late, there is no lack of busy tongues to tell me the place is haunted, and has been for, lo! these many years."

"Nonsense, Robert! I gave you credit for too much good sense to listen to the gossip of silly old wives. Put all these ridiculous tales of ghosts and hobgoblins out of your mind, man, and do not make me laugh at you, as if you were a child who had been so frightened by stories of 'raw-head and bloody-bones,' that you were afraid to blow out your candle and creep into bed."

"I am neither a fool nor a coward, and I will fight anything that I can feel has bone and muscle; but I am satisfied that if all the water in Siloam were poured over this place, it would not wash out the curse that people tell me has always rested on it since the time the pirates first located here. I can't admit I believe in witches, but undoubtedly I do believe in Satan, who seems to have a fee-simple to the place. It is not enough that my poor mother is buried yonder, but my wheat and oats took the rust; the mildew spoiled my grape crop; the rains ruined my melons; the worms ate up every blade of my grass; the cows have got the black-tongue; the gale blew down my pigeon-house and mashed all my squabs; and my splendid carnations and fuchsias are devoured by red spider. Nothing thrives, and I am sick at heart."

The dogged discontent written so legibly on his countenance, did not encourage the visitor to enter into a discussion of the abstract causes of blight, gales, and black-tongue, and he merely answered, —

"The evils you have enumerated are not peculiar to any locality; and all the farmers in this neighborhood are echoing your complaints. How is Mrs. Gerome?"

"Neither better nor worse. You know what miserable weather we have had for a week. This morning she ordered

Digitized by Google

the small carriage and horses brought to the door, and when I took the reins, she dismissed me and said she preferred driving herself. I told her the grays had not been used, and were badly pampered standing so long in their stalls, and that I was really afraid they would break her neck, as she was not strong enough to manage them; but she laughed, and answered that if they did, it would be the best day's work they had ever accomplished, and she would give them a chance. Down the beach they went like a flash, and when she came home their flanks smoked like a lime-kiln. What is ever to be done with my mistress, I am sure I don't know. She makes the house so doleful, that nobody wants to stay here, and only yesterday Katie and Phœbe, the cook, gave notice that they wished to leave when the month was out. She has no idea what she will do, or where she will go. We have wanted a hot-house, and she ordered me to get the builder's estimate of the cost of two plans which she drew; but when I carried them to her, she pushed them aside, and said she would think of the matter, but thought she might leave this place, and therefore would not need the building. She is as notionate as a child, and no one but my poor mother could ever manage her. Hist! sir! Don't you hear her? You may be sure there is mischief brewing when she sings like that."

Dr. Grey walked towards the house, and paused on the portico to listen, —

> "Quis est homo, qui non fleret
> Christi matrem si videret,
> In tanto supplicio."

The voice was not so strong as when he had heard it in *Addio del Passata*, but the solemn mournfulness of its cadences was better suited to the *Stabat Mater*, and indexed much that no other method of expression would have reached. After some moments she forsook Rossini, and began the *Agnus Dei* from Haydn's Third Mass, —

> "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere."

Surely she could not render this grand strain if her soul was

Digitized by Google

in fierce rebellion; and, with strained ears and hushed breath, Dr. Grey listened to the closing

"Dona nobis pacem, — pacem, — pacem"

It was a passionate, wailing prayer, and the only one that ever crossed her lips, yet his heart throbbed with pleasure, as he noted the tremor that seemed to shiver her voice into silvery fragments; and as she ended, he knew that tears were not far from her eyes.

When he entered the room, she had left the piano, and wheeled a sofa in front of the grate, where she sat gazing vacantly into the fiery fretwork of glowing coals.

A copy of Turner's "Liber Studiorum," superbly bound in purple velvet, lay on her knee, and into a corner of the sofa she had tossed a square of canvas almost filled with silken Parmese violets.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Gerome; I hope I do not interrupt you."

Dr. Grey removed the embroidery to the table, and seated himself in the sofa corner.

"Good evening. Interruption argues occupation and absorbed attention, and the term is not applicable to me. I who live as vainly, as uselessly, as fruitlessly, as some fakir twirling his thumbs and staring at his beard, have little right to call anything an interruption. My existence here is as still, as stagnant, as some pool down yonder in the sedge which last week's waves left among the sand hillocks, and your visits are like pebbles thrown into it, creating transient ripples and circles."

"You have gone back to the God of your æsthetic idolatry," said he, touching the "Liber Studiorum."

"Yes, because 'Beauty pitches her tents before him,' and his pencil is more potent in conjuring visions that enchant my wearied mind, than Jemschid's goblet or Iskander's mirror."

"But why stand afar off, trusting to human and fallible interpreters, when it is your privilege to draw near and dwell in the essence of the only real and divine beauty?"

"Better reverence it behind a veil, than suffer like Semele

Digitized by Google

I know my needs, and satisfy them fully. Once my heart was as bare of adoration as Egypt's tawny sands of crystal rain-pools; but looking into the realm of nature and of art, I chose the religion of the beautiful, and said to my famished soul, -

> 'From every channel thro' which Beauty runs,
> To fertilize the world with lovely things,
> I will draw freely, and be satisfied.'"

"This morbid sentimentality, this sickly gasping system of æsthetics, *soi-disant* 'Religion of the Beautiful,' is the curse of the age, — is a vast, universal vampire sucking the life from humanity. Like other idolatries it may arrogate the name of 'Religion,' but it is simply downright pagan materialism, and its votaries of the nineteenth century should look back two thousand years, and renew the *Panathenæa*. The ancient Greek worship of æsthetics was a proud and pardonable system, replete with sublime images; but the idols of your emasculated creed are yellow-haired women with straight noses, — are purple clouds and moon-silvered seas, — and physical beauty constitutes their sole excellence. Lovely landscapes and perfect faces are certainly entitled to a liberal quota of earnest admiration; but a religion that contents itself with merely material beauty, differs in nothing but nomenclature from the pagan worship of Cybele, Venus, and Astarte."

A chill smile momentarily brightened Mrs. Gerome's features, and turning towards her visitor, she answered slowly, —

"Be thankful, sir, that even the worship of beauty lingers in this world of sin and hate; and instead of defiling and demolishing its altars, go to work zealously and erect new ones at every cross-roads. Lessing spoke for me when he said, 'Only a misapprehended religion can remove us from the beautiful, and it is proof that a religion is true and rightly understood when it everywhere brings us back to the Beautiful."

"Pardon me. I accept Lessing's words, but cavil at your interpretation of them. His reverence for Beauty embraced not merely physical and material types, but that nobler, grander beauty which centres in pure ethics and ontology; and a religion

Digitized by Google

that seeks no higher forms than those of clay, — whether Himalayas or 'Greek Slave,' — whether emerald icebergs, flashing under polar auroras, or the myosotis that nods there on the mantel-piece, — a religion that substitutes beauty for duty, and Nature for Nature's God, is a shameful sham, and a curse to its devotees. There is a beauty worthy of all adoration, a beauty far above Antinous, or Gula or Greek æsthetics, — a beauty that is not the *disjecta membra* that modern maudlin sentimentality has left it, — but that perfect and immortal 'Beauty of Holiness,' that outlives marble and silver, pigment, stylus, and pagan poems that deify dust."

He leaned towards her, watching eagerly for some symptom of interest in the face before him, and bent his head until he inhaled the fragrance of the violets which clustered on one side of the coil of hair.

"'Beauty of Holiness.' Show it to me, Dr. Grey. Is it at La Trappe, or the Hospice of St. Bernard? Where are its temples? Where are its worshippers? Who is its Hierophant?"

"Jesus Christ."

She closed her eyes for a moment, as if to shut out some painful vision evoked by his words.

"Sir, do you recollect the reply of Laplace, when Napoleon asked him why there was no mention of God in his '*Mécanique Celeste?*' '*Sire, je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse.*' I was not sufficiently insane to base my religion of beauty upon a holiness that was buried in the tomb supplied by Joseph of Arimathea, — that was long ago hunted out of the world it might have purified. Once I believed in, and revered what I supposed was its existence, but I was speedily disenchanted of my faith, for, —

> 'I have seen those that wore Heaven's armor, worsted:
> I have heard Truth lie:
> Seen Life, beside the founts for which it thirsted,
> Curse God and die.'

Dr. Grey, I do not desire to sneer at your Christian trust, and God knows I would give all my earthly possessions and hopes for a religion that would insure me your calm resignation

Digitized by Google

and contentment; but the resurrection of my faith would only resemble that beautiful floral *Palingenesis* (asserted by Gaffarel and Kircher), which was but 'the pale spectre of a flower coming slowly forth from its own ashes,' and speedily dropping back into dust. Leave me in the enjoyment of the only pleasure earth can afford me, the contemplation of the beautiful."

"Unless you blend with it the true and good, your love of beauty will degenerate into the merely sensuous æsthetics, which, at the present day, renders its votaries fastidious, etiolated voluptuaries. The deification of humanity, so successfully inaugurated by Feuerbach and Strauss, is now no longer confined to realms of abstract speculation; but cultivated sensualism has sunk so low that popular poets chant the praises of Phryne and Cleopatra, and painters and sculptors seek to immortalize types that degrade the taste of all lovers of Art. The true mission of Art, whether through the medium of books, statues, or pictures, is to purify and exalt; but the curse of our age is, that the fashionable pantheistic raving about Nature, and the apotheosizing of physical loveliness, is rapidly sinking into a worship of the vilest elements of humanity and materialism. Pagan æsthetics were purer and nobler than the system, which, under that name, finds favor with our generation."

She listened, not assentingly, but without any manifestation of impatience, and while he talked, her eyes rested dreamily upon the yellow beach, where, —

> "Trampling up the sloping sand,
> In lines outreaching far and wide,
> The white-maned billows swept to land."

Whether she pondered his words, or was too entirely absorbed by her own thoughts to heed their import, he had no means of ascertaining.

"Mrs. Gerome, what have you painted recently?"

"Nothing, since my illness; and perhaps I shall never touch my brush again. Sometimes I have thought I would paint a picture of Handel standing up to listen to that sad song from

Digitized by Google

his own 'Samson,'—'*Total eclipse, no sun, no moon!*' But I doubt whether I could put on canvas that grand, mournful, blind face, turned eagerly towards the stage, while tears ran swiftly from his sightless eyes. Again, I have vague visions of a dead Schopenhauer, seated in the corner of the sofa, with his pet poodle, Putz, howling at his master's ghastly white features,—with his Indian Oupnekhat lying on his rigid knee, and his gilded statuette of Gotama Buddha grinning at him from the mantel-piece, welcoming him to Nirwána. There stands my easel, empty and shrouded; and here, from day to day, I sit idle, not lacking ideas, but the will to clothe them. Unlike poor Maurice de Guerin, who said that his 'head was parching; that, like a tree which had lived its life, he felt as though every passing wind were blowing through dead branches in his top,' I feel that my brain is as vigorous and restless as ever, while my will alone is paralyzed, and my heart withered and cold within me."

"Your brush and palette will never yield you any permanent happiness, nor promote a spirit of contentment, until you select a different class of subjects. Your themes are all too sombre, too dismal, and the sole *motif* that runs through your music and painting seems to be *in memoriam*. Open the windows of your gloomy soul, and let God's sunshine stream into its cold recesses, and warm and gild and gladden it. Throw aside your morbid proclivities for the melancholy and abnormal, and paint peaceful *genre* pictures,—a group of sunburnt, laughing harvesters, or merry children, or tulip-beds with butterflies swinging over them. You need more warmth in your heart, and more light in your pictures."

"Eminently correct,—most incontestably true; but how do you propose to remedy the imperfect *chiaro-oscuro* of my character? Show me the market where that light of peace and joy is bartered, and I will constitute you my broker, with unlimited orders. No, no. I see the fact as plainly as you do, but I know better than you how irremediable it is. My soul is a doleful *morgue*, and my pictures are dim photographs of its

Digitized by Google

corpse-tenants. Shut in forever from the sunshine, I dip my brush in the shadows that surround me, for, like Empedocles, —

> . . . 'I alone
> Am dead to life and joy; therefore I read
> In all things my own deadness.'"

"If you would free yourself from the coils of an intense and selfish egoism that fetter you to the petty cares and trials of your individual existence, — if you would endeavor to forget for a season the woes of Mrs. Gerome, and expend a little more sympathy on the sorrows of others, — if you would resolve to lose sight of the caprices that render you so unpopular, and make some human being happy by your aid and kind words, — in fine, if, instead of selecting as your model some cynical, half-insane woman like Lady Hester Stanhope, you chose for imitation the example of noble Christian usefulness and self-abnegation, analogous to that of Florence Nightingale, or Mrs. Fry, you would soon find that your conscience —"

"Enough! You weary me. Dr. Grey, I thoroughly understand your motives, and honor their purity, but I beg that you will give yourself no further anxiety on my account. You can not, from your religious standpoint, avoid regarding me as worse than a heathen, and have constituted yourself a missionary to reclaim and consecrate me. I am not quite a cannibal, ready to devour you, by way of recompense for your charitable efforts in my behalf, but I must assure you your interest and sympathy are sadly wasted. Do you remember that celebrated 'vase of Soissons,' which was plundered by rude soldiery in Rheims, and which Clovis so eagerly coveted at the distribution of the spoils? A soldier broke it before the king's hungry eyes, and forced him to take the worthless mocking fragments. Even so flint-faced fate shattered my happiness, and tauntingly offers me the ruins; but I will none of it!"

"Trust God's overruling mercy, and those fragments, fused in the furnace of affliction, may be remoulded and restored to you in pristine perfection."

"Impossible! Moreover, I trust nothing but the brevity of

Digitized by Google

human life, which one day can not fail to release me from an existence that has proved an almost intolerable burden. You know Vogt says, 'The natural laws are rude, unbending powers,' and I comfort myself by hoping that they can neither be bribed nor browbeaten out of the discharge of their duty, which points to death as 'the surest calculation that can be made, — as the unavoidable keystone of every individual life.' A grim consolation, you think? True; but all I shall ever receive. Dr. Grey, in your estimation I am sinfully inert and self-indulgent; and you conscientiously commend my idle hands to the benevolent work of knitting socks for indigent ditchers, and making jackets for pauper children. Now, although it is considered neither orthodox nor modest to furnish left-hand with a trumpet for sounding the praises of almsgiving right-hand, still I must be allowed to assert that I appropriate an ample share of my fortune for charitable purposes. Perhaps you will tell me that I do not give in a proper spirit of loving sympathy, — that I hurl my donations at my conscience, as 'a sop to Cerberus.' I have never injured any one, and if I have no tender love in my heart to expend on others, it is the fault of that world which taught me how hollow and deceitful it is. God knows I have never intentionally wounded any living thing; and if negatively good, at least my career has no stain of positive evil upon it. I am one of those concerning whom Richter said, 'There are souls for whom life has no summer. These should enjoy the advantages of the inhabitants of Spitzbergen, where, through the winter's day, the stars shine clear as through the winter's night.' I have neither summer nor polar stars, but I wait for that long night wherein I shall sleep peacefully."

"Mrs. Gerome, defiant pride bars your heart from the white-handed peace that even now seeks entrance. Some great sorrow or sin has darkened your past, and, instead of ejecting its memory, you hug it to your soul; you make it a mental Juggernaut, crushing the hopes and aims that might otherwise brighten the path along which you drag this murderous idol. Cast it away forever, and let Peace and Hope clasp hands over its empty throne."

Digitized by Google

From that peculiar far-off expression of the human eye that generally indicates abstraction of mind, he feared that she had not heard his earnest appeal; but after some seconds, she smiled drearily, and repeated with singular and touching pathos, lines which proved that his words were not lost upon her,—

> "'Ah, could the memory cast her spots, as do
> The snake's brood theirs in spring! and be once more
> Wholly renewed, to dwell in the time that's new,—
> With no reiterance of those pangs of yore.
> Peace, peace! Ah, forgotten things
> Stumble back strangely! and the ghost of June
> Stands by December's fire, cold, cold! and puts
> The last spark out.'"

The mournful sweetness and calmness of her low voice made Dr. Grey's heart throb fiercely, and he leaned a little farther forward to study her countenance. She had rested her elbow on the carved side of the sofa, and now her cheek nestled for support in one hand, while th eother toyed unconsciously with the velvet edges of the *Liber Studiorum*. Her dress was of some soft, shining fabric, neither satin nor silk, and its pale blue lustre shed a chill, pure light over the wan, delicate face, that was white as a bending lily.

The faint yet almost mesmeric fragrance of orange flowers and violets floated in the folds of her garments, and seemed lurking in the waves of gray hair that glistened in the bright steady glow of the red grate; and moved by one of those unaccountable impulses that sometimes decide a man's destiny, Dr. Grey took the exquisitely beautiful hand from the book and enclosed t in both of his.

"Mrs. Gerome, you seem strangely unsuspicious of the real nature of the interest with which you have inspired me; and I owe it to you, as well as to myself, to avow the feelings that prompt me to seek your society so frequently. For some months after I met you, my professional visits afforded me only rare and tantalizing glimpses of you, but from the day of Elsie's

Digitized by Google

death, I have been conscious that my happiness is indissolubly linked with yours, — that my heart, which never before acknowledged allegiance to any woman, is — "

"For God's sake, stop! I can not listen to you."

She had wrung her hand violently from his clinging fingers, and, springing to her feet, stood waving him from her, while an expression of horror came swiftly into her eyes and over her whole countenance.

Dr. Grey rose also, and though a sudden pallor spread from his lips to his temples, his calm voice did not falter.

"Is it because you can never return my love, that you so vehemently refuse to hear its avowal? Is it because your own heart — "

"It is because your love is an insult, and must not be uttered!"

She shivered as if rudely buffeted by some freezing blast, and the steely glitter leaped up, like the flash of a poniard, in her large, dilating eyes.

Shocked and perplexed, he looked for a moment at her writhing features, and put out his hand.

"Can it be possible that you so utterly misapprehend me? You surely can not doubt the earnestness of an affection which impels me to offer my hand and heart to you, — the first woman I have ever loved. Will you refuse — "

"Stand back! Do not touch me! Ah, — God help me! Take your hand from mine. Are you blind? If you were an archangel I could not listen to you, for — for — oh, Dr. Grey!"

She covered her face with her hands, and staggered towards a chair.

A horrible, sickening suspicion made his brain whirl and his heart stand still. He followed her, and said, pleadingly, —

"Do not keep me in painful suspense. Why is my declaration of devoted affection so revolting to you? Why can you not at least permit me to express the love — "

"Because that love dishonors me! Dr. Grey, I — am — a — wife!"

Digitized by Google

The words fell slowly from her white lips, as if her heart's blood were dripping with them, and a deep, purplish spot burned on each cheek, to attest her utter humiliation.

Dr. Grey gazed at her, with a bewildered, incredulous expression.

"You mean that your heart is buried in your husband's grave?"

"Oh, if that were true, you and I might be spared this shame and agony."

A low wail escaped her, and she hid her face in her arms.

"Mrs. Gerome, is not your husband dead?"

"Dead to me, — but not yet in his grave. The man I married is still alive."

She heard a half-stifled groan, and buried her face deeper in her arms to avoid the sight of the suffering she had caused.

For some time the stillness of death reigned around them, and when at last the wretched woman raised her eyes, she saw Dr. Grey standing beside her, with one hand on the back of her chair, the other clasped over his eyes. Reverently she turned and pressed her lips to his cold fingers, and he felt her hot tears falling upon them, as she said, falteringly, —

"Forgive me the pain that I have innocently inflicted on you. God is my witness, I did not imagine you cared for me. I supposed you pitied me, and were only interested in saving my miserable soul. The servants told me you were very soon to be married to a young girl who lived with your sister; and I never dreamed that your noble, generous heart felt any interest in me, save that of genuine Christian compassion for my loneliness and desolation. If I had suspected your feelings, I would have gone away immediately, or told you all. Oh, that I had never come here! — that I had never left my safe retreat, near Funchal! Then I would not have stabbed the heart of the only man whom I respect, revere, and trust."

Some moments elapsed ere he could fully command himself, and when he spoke he had entirely regained composure.

"Do not reproach yourself. The fault has been mine, rather than yours. Knowing that some mystery enveloped your early

Digitized by Google

life, I should not have allowed my affections to centre so completely in one concerning whose antecedents I knew absolutely nothing. I have been almost culpably rash and blind, — but I could not look into your beautiful, sad eyes, and doubt that you were worthy of the love that sprang up unbidden in my heart. I knew that you were irreligious, but I believed I could win you back to Christ; and when I tell you that, after living thirty-eight years, you are the only woman I ever met whom I wished to call my wife, you can in some degree realize my confidence in the innate purity of your character. God only knows how severely I am punished for my rashness, how profoundly I deplore the strange infatuation that so utterly blinded me. At least, I am grateful that my brief madness has not involved you in sin and additional suffering."

The burning spots faded from her cheeks as she listened to his low, solemn words, and when he ended, she clasped her hands passionately, and exclaimed, —

"Do not judge me, until you know all. I am not as unworthy as you fear. Do not withdraw your confidence from me."

He shook his head, and answered, sadly, —

"A wife, yet bereft of your husband's protection! A wife, wandering among strangers, and a deserter from the home you vowed to cheer! Your own admission cries out in judgment against you."

He walked to the table and picked up his gloves; and Mrs. Gerome rose and advanced a few steps.

"Dr. Grey, you will come now and then to see me?"

"No; for the present I do not wish to see you."

"Ah! how brittle are men's promises! Did you not swear to Elsie that you would never forsake her wretched child?"

"Our painful relations invalidate that promise, — cancel that pledge. I can not visit you as formerly; still, I shall at all times be glad to serve you; and you have only to acquaint me with your wishes to insure their execution."

"Remember how solitary, how desolate, I am."

"A wife should be neither, while her husband lives."

Digitized by Google

The cold severity of his tone wounded her inexpressibly, and she haughtily drew herself up.

"Dr. Grey will at least allow me an opportunity of explaining the circumstances that he seems to regard as so heinous?"

He looked at the proud but quivering mouth, — into the great, shadowy, gray eyes, and a heavy sigh escaped him.

"Perhaps it is better that I should know your history, for it will diminish my own unhappiness to feel assured that you are worthy of the estimate I placed upon you one hour ago. Shall I come to-morrow, or will you tell me now what you desire me to know?"

"I can not sleep until I have exonerated myself in your clear, truthful, holy eyes: I can not endure that you should think harshly of me, even for a day. This room is suffocating! I will meet you on the portico; and yonder, by the sea, I will show you my life."

She went to the escritoire, opened one of the drawers, and took out a package. Wrapping a cloak around her, she quitted the parlor, and found Dr. Grey leaning against one of the columns.

He did not offer her his arm as formerly, but slowly and silently they walked down towards the beach, where the surf was rolling heavily in with a steady roar, and tossing sheets of foam around the stone piers.

> . . . "While far across the hills,
> A dark and brazen sunset ribbed with black,
> Glared, like the sullen eyeballs of the plague."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXVII.

"DOCTOR GREY, had you possessed a tithe of the ingenuity of Peiresc, you might long ago have interpreted the deep, dark incisions in my character, which, like the indentations on his celebrated amethyst, show where the *lamina* of luckless events inscribed my history with mournful ciphers. Elsie's hints would have furnished any woman with a clew; but, since you have not availed yourself of their aid, I must lift the shroud that hides the corpse of my youth, my happiness, my faith in man, my hope in God. Ah! unto what shall I liken it? This ruined, wretched thing I call my life? To the *Tauk e Kerra*, — standing in a dreary waste, lifting its vast, keyless arch helplessly to heaven? Even such a crumbling arch, beautiful and grand in its glorious promise, is the incomplete, crownless life of Agla Gerome, — a lonely and melancholy monument of a gigantic failure. Two months before my birth, my father, Henderson Flewellyn, died, and when I was three hours old, my poor young mother followed him, leaving me to the care of her nurse, Elsie Maclean, and of an old uncle who was at that time residing in Copenhagen. Having no relatives to dictate, Elsie named me Vashti, for my mother; but my great-uncle wrote that my baptism must be deferred until he could be present, and instructed her to call me Evelyn, after himself. But the stubborn Scotch will would not bend, and my name was written in the family Bible, Vashti Flewellyn. Before the expiration of three years, Mr. Mitchell Evelyn died, bequeathing his fortune to me, as Evelyn Flewellyn, and consigning me to the guardianship of Mr. Lucian Wright, a widowed minister of New York. I was a feeble, sickly child, hovering continually upon the confines of death, and, as city air was deemed injurious to me, Elsie kept me at a farm-house on the Hudson, belonging to the estate that I was destined to inherit. Here I remained until my tenth year, when Mr. Wright removed me to the vicinity of Albany, and placed me under the care of his maiden sister, who had a small class of

Digitized by Google

girls to educate. Elsie accompanied and watched over me, and here I spent four quiet, happy years; but the death of my teacher set me once more afloat, and I was carried to New York, and left at a large and fashionable boarding-school. I was fond of study, and boundlessly ambitious, and soon formed a warm, close friendship with a teacher who entered the institution after I became one of its inmates. I had no one to love but Elsie, who never left me, and consequently, I gave to Edith Dexter, the young teacher, all the affection that I would have lavished on parents, brothers, and sisters, had they been granted to me. She was several years my senior, and the loveliest woman I ever saw. Reared in affluence, her family had become impoverished, and Edith was thrown upon her own resources for a support. My father's fortune was very large, and the property left me by Mr. Evelyn swelled my estate to very unusual proportions. Mr. Wright had carefully attended to the investment of the income, and I was regarded as the heiress of enormous wealth. Tenderly attached to Edith, whose beauty, intelligence, and varied accomplishments rendered her peculiarly attractive, I loaded her with presents, and determined that as soon as my educational career ended, I would establish myself in an elegant residence on Fifth Avenue, take Edith to live under my roof, treat her always as my sister, and share my ample fortune with her. Dr. Grey, you can form no adequate conception of the depth of the love I entertained for her. Day and night my busy brain devised schemes for lightening her labors, for promoting her happiness; and I spared no exertion to shield her from the petty vexations and humiliating annoyances incident to her situation. Waking, I prayed for her; sleeping in her arms, I dreamed of the future we should spend together. At the close of the session, she went into Vermont to visit her invalid mother, and I to Mr. Wright's quiet home, to remain until the end of vacation. The minister was a kind-hearted but weak old man, who treated me tenderly, and humored every caprice that attacked my brain. I had never before been his guest, and here, at his house, on the second day of my sojourn, I met his favorite nephew, Maurice Carlyle."

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Gerome uttered the name through firmly set teeth, and the blue cords on her forehead tangled terribly.

Clenching her fingers, she drew a long breath, and continued,—

"At that time, he was by far the most fascinating, and certainly the handsomest man I have ever met, and when I recall the beauty of his face, the grace of his manner, the noble symmetry of his figure, and the sparkling vivacity of his conversation, I do not wonder that from the first hour of our acquaintance he charmed me. I was but a child, a proud, impulsive young thing, full of romance, full of wild dreams of manly chivalry and feminine constancy and devotion; and Maurice Carlyle seemed the perfect incarnation of all my glowing ideals of knightly excellence and heroism. He was thirty, —I not yet sixteen; he poor and fastidious,—I generous and trusting, and possessed of one of the largest estates on the continent. He had spent much of his life abroad, and was as polished as any courtier who ever graced St. Cloud or St. James; I an impetuous young simpleton, who knew nothing of the world, save those tantalizing glimpses snatched from behind the bars of a boarding-school. Here, examine these portraits, while the light still lingers, and you will see the woful disparity that existed between us at that period. They were painted a fortnight after I met him."

She opened a velvet case, and laid before her companion two oval ivory miniatures, richly set with large pearls.

Dr. Grey took them both in his hand, and, by the dull, lurid glow that tipped a ridge of clouds lying along the western horizon, he saw two pictures.

One, a remarkably handsome man, with brilliant black eyes and regular features, and a cast of countenance that forcibly reminded him of the likenesses of Edgar A. Poe, while the expression denoted more of chicane than chivalry in his character. The other, a fresh, sweet, girlish face, eloquent with innocence and purity, with clear, gray eyes, overhung by jetty lashes, and overarched by black brows, while a mass of dark hair was heaped in short curls on her forehead and temples, and fell in long ringlets over her neck.

Digitized by Google

Dr. Grey looked at Mrs. Gerome, and now at the portrait, but the resemblance could nowhere be traced, save in the delicate yet haughty arch of the eyebrows, and the dainty moulding of the faultless nose.

While he glanced from one to the other, she placed a third miniature beside those in his hand, and he started at sight of a surpassingly lovely countenance, which recalled the outlines of one that he had left in his library three hours before, where Miss Dexter sat reading to Muriel.

"There you have the gods of my old worship,—Edith and Maurice. Can you wonder at my infatuation?"

She took the pictures, and a derisive smile distorted her lips, as she looked shiveringly at them, and hastily replaced them on their velvet cushions. Closing the spring with a convulsive snap, she tossed the case on the terrace, whence it fell to the grass below; and drew her blue velvet drapery closer around her.

"Dr. Grey, you know quite enough of human nature to anticipate what followed. Three days after I met Maurice Carlyle, he swore deathless devotion to his 'gray-eyed angel,' and offered me his hand. Ah! when I recall that evening, and think of the words uttered so tenderly, so passionately, when I summon before me that radiant face, and listen again to the voice that so utterly bewitched me, the remembrance maddens me, and I feel a murderous hate of my race stirring my blood into fierce throbs. With my hands folded in his, we planned our future, painted visions that made my brain reel, and when his lips touched my forehead, as sacred seal of our betrothal, I felt that earth could add nothing to my blessed lot. Of course Mr. Wright warmly sanctioned my choice, drugging his conscience with the reflection that if Maurice was extravagant and inert, my fortune would obviate the necessity of his attending to his nominal profession, that of the law. The old man insisted, however, that as I was a mere child, we must defer our marriage two years. Mr. Carlyle frowned, and vowed he could not live more than twelve months without his 'peerless prize,' and like any other silly girl, I believed it as unhesitatingly as I

Digitized by Google

did the lessons from the gospels that were read to us night and morning. What cloudless days flew over my young head, during the ensuing month; days wherein I never tired of kneeling and thanking God for the marvellous blessing of Maurice Carlyle's love. Life was mantling in a crystal goblet, like *eau de vie de Dantzic*, and I could not even taste it without watching the gold sparkles rise and fall and flash; and how could I dream, then, that the draught was not brightened with gilt leaves, but really flavored with *curare?* The only drawback to my happiness was Elsie's opposition to my engagement, and Mr. Carlyle's refusal to allow me to acquaint Edith with my betrothal. He was so 'furiously jealous of that yellow-haired woman whom his darling loved too well.' It would be quite time enough to inform her of my happiness when I returned to school. From the beginning, Elsie distrusted, disliked, and eyed him suspiciously, but her expostulations and arguments only strengthened his influence, and partially overthrew hers. One day Mr. Carlyle sought me in great haste, and with considerable agitation informed me that he had been unexpectedly summoned abroad. Business, with the details of which he tenderly forbore to weary me, would detain him many months in Europe, and he implored me to consent to a private marriage before his departure. Mr. Wright was in very feeble health, had been threatened with paralysis, and my ardent lover would be too unendurably miserable separated from me, when death might at any moment rob me of my guardian. I consented, and hastened to obtain Mr. Wright's sanction. That day chanced to be one of his despondent, hypochondriacal seasons, and after some persuasion on my part, and much sophistry from his nephew, the weak old man yielded. Then my lover pressed his advantage, and vowed he could never leave me, that his young bride must accompany him to London, that my mind would be too much engrossed by thoughts of him to permit the possibility of my studying advantageously in his absence, and that he would assume the responsibility of superintending and perfecting his wife's education. Mr Wright demurred; Mr. Carlyle raved; I wept. Maurice clasped me in his arms, and in the midst of my tears and pleadings, my

Digitized by Google

guardian succumbed. It was arranged that our marriage should take place within a fortnight, and that we should immediately start to Europe. Poor Elsie! — truest, wisest, best friend God ever gave me, — was enraged and distressed beyond expression. She wept, wrung her hands, and falling on her knees entreated me not to execute my insane purpose, — assured me I was a lamb led to sacrifice, was the victim of an infamous scheme between uncle and nephew to possess themselves of my estate, and she exhausted argument and persuasion in attempting to recall my wandering common sense. Much as I loved her, this bitter vituperation of my idol incensed and estranged me, and I temporarily forbade her to enter my presence. Poor, dear, devoted Elsie! When my heart relented, and I sought her to assure her of my forgiveness, tears and groans greeted me, and I found her sitting at the foot of her bed, with her face hidden in her apron."

Stretching her arms towards the grave, Mrs. Gerome paused; her lips quivered, and two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Ah! dear old heart! Brave, true, tender soul! How different my lot would have been had I heeded her prayers and counsel! Not until I lie down yonder, and mingle my dust with hers, can I, even for an instant, forget her faithful, sleepless care and love. I believe she is the only human being who was ever tenderly and truly attached to me, and God knows I learned before I lost her how much her affection was worth."

The cold, ringing voice grew tremulous, wavering, and some moments passed before Mrs. Gerome continued, —

"Mr. Carlyle preferred a private wedding, but I insisted upon a ceremony at the church where Mr. Wright officiated, and immediately telegraphed to Edith, requesting her presence as bridesmaid, and offering to provide her outfit and defray all expenses, if she would accompany us to Europe. My betrothed bit his lip, and objected; but on this point, at least, I was firm, and assured him I would not be married unless Edith could be with me. She wrote, declining my invitation to Europe, but came to New York, the day of my wedding. When I look back at what followed, I have a vague, confused feeling, similar to that which

Digitized by Google

results from taking opium. Mr. Carlyle had positively interdicted my taking Elsie to Europe, assuring me that his wife should not be in leading-strings to a spoiled and presumptuous nurse, and promising me that, when we returned to America, she might occupy the position of housekeeper in our establishment. Absorbed by my own supreme happiness, I scarcely saw Edith until we were dressed for the ceremony, and when she came and leaned against the table where the bridal presents were arranged, I noticed that she was pale and much agitated, but ascribed her emotion to grief at my approaching departure. Several of my schoolmates officiated as bridesmaids, and a large party assembled at the church to witness the marriage. Mr. Carlyle was a great favorite in society, and his friends were invited to the wedding breakfast at the parsonage. It was on the bright morning of my sixteenth birthday, when I stood before the altar and listened to and uttered the words that made me a wife. Every syllable, every intonation, of the minister's voice is branded on my memory as with a red-hot iron: 'Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, serve him, love, honor, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?' And there, before the altar, with the stained glass making a rainbow behind the pulpit, I answered, '*I will.*' Oh, Dr. Grey, pity me! pity me!"

A cry of anguish escaped her, and she extended her arms until her hands rested on her companion's shoulder.

In silence he bent his head, and put his lips to the tightly clasped fingers.

"Tell me, sir, — if that vow means that man may make a plaything of God's statutes? If it binds for one hour, does it not bind while life lasts?"

"'*So long as ye both shall live,*'" answered Dr. Grey, solemnly; and he gently removed her hand, and drew himself a little farther from her.

She was too painfully engrossed by sad reminiscences to notice the action, and resumed her narrative.

Digitized by Google

"There was a gay party at the breakfast, and I could not remove my fascinated eyes from the radiant face of my husband, who had never seemed half so princely as now, when he was wholly my own. Once he bent his handsome head to mine, and whispered, '*La Peregrina*,' the pet name he had given me, because he averred that, in his estimation, my love was worth as many ducats as that celebrated pearl of Philip. '*La Peregrina*,' indeed! Ah! he melted it in gall and hemlock, and drained it at his wedding feast. My heart was so overflowing with happiness that I slipped my fingers into his, and, in answer to his fond epithet, whispered, 'Maurice, my king.'"

The speaker was silent for a moment, and an expression of disgust and scorn usurped the place of mournfulness.

"Dr. Grey, I deserved my punishment, for no Aztec ever worshipped his stone God more devoutly than I did my black-eyed, smooth-lipped idol. 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Ah! my 'graven image' seemed so marvellously godlike that I bowed down before it; and there, in the midst of my adoration, the curse of idolatry smote me. Half bewildered by the rapture that made my heart throb almost to suffocation, I stole away from the guests and hid myself in the small hot-house attached to Mr. Wright's study, longing for a little quiet that would enable me to realize all the blessedness of my lot. With childish glee I toyed with my title,—with my new name,—Maurice Carlyle's wife—Evelyn Carlyle! How pretty it sounded,—how holy it seemed! My future was as brilliant as that vast enchanted hall into which poor Nouronihar was enticed through her insane love for Vathek, and, like hers, my illusion was dispelled by a decree that strangled hope in my heart, and enveloped it in flames."

Here the flood of melancholy memories drowned her words, and, crossing her arms on the stone balustrade, she sat silent and moody

In the dusky, crepuscular light, Dr. Grey could no longer discern the emotions that printed themselves so legibly on her countenance; but the outline of her face, and the listless, hopeless droop of her figure, curved between him and the dun waste of waters.

Digitized by Google

Overhead a few dim, hazy stars shivered on the ragged skirts of trailing gray clouds, and the ceaseless rustle of the shuddering poplars formed a mournful accompaniment to the muttering of the ocean, whose weary waves were sobbing themselves to rest, like scourged but unconquered children.

"I thank you for your patience, Dr. Grey. You forbear to hurry me, even as you would shrink from rudely jostling or pushing forward the mattock which slowly digs into a grave,—removing human mould and crumbling coffin, searching for the skeleton beneath. Exhuming human bones is melancholy work, but sadder still is the mission of one who disinters the ashes of a woman's love, hope, and faith. Across the centre of Mr. Wright's hot-house ran a light trellis of fine lattice-work, cut into an arch and covered with the dense luxuriant foliage of the bignonia trained over it. Behind this screen I had ensconced my happy self, and sat idly bruising the leaves of a rose geranium that chanced to be near me, when my blissful reverie was interrupted by the sound of that voice which had stolen my heart, my reason, my common sense. Believing that he had missed and was searching for his bride, I rose and peeped through the glossy leaves of the clambering vine that divided us. Not four feet distant stood my husband of an hour, with his arms clasped fondly around Edith, who, in a broken, passionate voice, denounced his perfidy and heartlessness. Vehemently he pleaded for an opportunity to exculpate himself, and there, tearful and sobbing, with her head on his bosom, my friend listened to an explanation that was destined to enlighten more than one person. From his lips I learned that he had become entangled in certain financial difficulties that involved his honor as a gentleman; he had used money to enable him to embark in a speculation which, if successful, would have afforded him the means of marrying in accordance with the dictates of his heart; but, like the majority of nefarious schemes, it failed signally, and fear of detection, and the absolute necessity of obtaining a large amount of money, had goaded him to the desperate step of sacrificing his happiness and offering his hand to me. He strained her to his breast, kissed her repeatedly, and impiously

Digitized by Google

called God to witness that he loved her, and her only, truly, tenderly; that never for an instant had his affection wandered from her, 'his beautiful, idolized darling.' He bitterly denounced his folly, cursed the hour that had thrown me and my fortune in his path, and swore that he utterly loathed and despised the silly child whose wealth alone had made her his dupe; and, as he flatteringly expressed it, his 'hated and intolerable incubus.' He had intended to spare her and himself the agony of this hour, — had determined to remain always in Europe, where he could escape the mocking contrast of his bride and his beloved. With indescribable scorn, and a wonderful fertility of derisive epithets, he held me up, as on the point of a scalpel, and proved the utter impossibility of his having been influenced by any other than the most grossly mercenary motives; while, between the bursts of invective against me, he lavished upon her a hundred fond, tender, passionate phrases of endearment that had never been applied to me. Pressing one hand on her head, he raised the other, and called Heaven to witness, that, although the world might regard him as the husband of 'that sallow, gray-eyed, silly girl,' whose gold alone had bought his name, the only woman he could ever love was his own beautiful Edith; and, should death come to his aid and free him from the detested bond that linked him to the heiress, he swore he would not lose a day in claiming the lovely wife that fate had denied him. All this, and much more, which I have not now the requisite patience to recapitulate, fell on my ears, startling me more painfully than the trumpet-blast of the Last Judgment will ever do. Standing there, in my costly bridal robe, I listened to the revelation that blotted out all sun and moon and stars from my life, — that made earth a dismal Sheol and the future a howling desolation, — a dreary wilderness of woe. In my agony and shame I clenched my hands so savagely, one upon the other, that my diamond betrothal-ring cut sharply into the quivering flesh, and blood-drops oozed and dripped on my shining gossamer veil and white velvet dress. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, my whole nature was

Digitized by Google

metamorphosed; and my coming years swept in panoramic vision before me, beckoning me to the prompt performance of a stern and humiliating duty. The blood in my veins seemed to hiss and bubble like a seething cauldron, and my heart fired with a hate for which language has no name, no garb, no provision; but my brain kept faithful guard, and reason calmly pointed out my future path. When Mr. Carlyle ended his tirade against me and his curses on his own folly, I moved forward into the arch and confronted my dethroned and defiled gods. If the tedious years of the primitive patriarchs could be allotted to me they would never suffice to efface the picture that lingers in deep, hot lines on my memory, and pursues me as ruthlessly as the avenging cross followed and tortured the miserable fugitive in Gustave Doré's '*Le Juif errant*,' or the Eyeless Christ that proved a haunting Nemesis to the Empress Irene. Edith's lovely face was on his bosom, and his false, handsome lips were pressed to hers. So, I met my husband and my dearest friend, one hour after the utterance of vows that were perhaps still echoing in the courts of heaven. Such spectacles of human perfidy are the real Medusas that Gorgonize trusting, tender, throbbing hearts, and in view of this one I laughed aloud, — laughed so unnaturally that it was no marvel I was called a maniac. At sight of my desperate white face Edith shrieked and fainted, and Maurice blanched and stammered and cowered. Without a word of comment or recrimination I silently passed on to my own room, where Elsie was waiting to clothe me in my travelling-suit. In three hours the steamer would sail, and I had little leisure for resolution and execution. Summoning the lawyer to whose care my estate was entrusted, I requested him to call Mr. Wright and Mr. Carlyle into the dressing-room that adjoined my apartment, and there I held an audience with the three who were most interested in my career. Briefly I explained what had occurred, and announced my determination, then and there, to separate forever from the man who could never be more than my nominal husband. I told them I held marriage, next to the Lord's Supper, the holiest sacrament

Digitized by Google

inaugurated by God, but mine had been an infamous mockery, an unpardonable sin against me, and an insult to Heaven, whose blessing could never rest upon it. Marriage, without sanctifying love, was unhallowed, was a transgression of divine law, and a crime against my womanhood which neither God nor man should forgive. Maurice Carlyle had perjured himself, — had never loved the woman who went with him to the altar, — and the affection that had stirred my heart one hour before, was now as dead as the Pharaohs hidden for centuries under the pyramids. We two, who had sworn to love, honor, and cherish one another, now hated and despised each other beyond all possibility of expression; and I considered it a heinous sin to perpetuate the awful mockery, to cling to the letter of a contract that bade defiance to every impulse of heart and soul, — to every dictate of reason and decree of conscience. Wedded lives and divided hearts I believed a crime, and while I admitted that man could not put asunder those whom God's statutes joined together, I contended that Mr. Carlyle's perjury rendered it sinful for him and me to reside under the same roof. I could not recognize the validity of divorces, for human hands could not unlink God's fetters, and man's law had no power to free either of us from the bonds we had voluntarily assumed in the invoked presence of Jehovah. I would neither accept nor permit a divorce, for, in my estimation, it was not worth the paper that framed it, and was a species of sacrilegious trifling; but I would never live as the wife of a man who had repeatedly declared he had not an atom of affection for me. *Under some circumstances I deemed separation a woman's duty*, and while I fully comprehended the awful import of the vow '*Till death us do part*,' and denied that human legislators could free us, or annul the marriage, I was resolved, while life lasted, to consider myself a duped, an unloved, but a lawful wife, — a woman consecrated by solemn oaths that no human action could cancel. Since money was the bait, I was willing to divide my fortune as the price of a quiet separation; and though from that hour I intended to quit his presence forever, and regard the tie that linked us as merely nominal,

Digitized by Google

I would allow him a liberal income until I attained my majority, and would liquidate all his present debts. To your imagination, Dr. Grey, I leave the details of what ensued,—my guardian's remorseful grief, my lawyer's wonder and expostulation, Mr. Carlyle's confusion, chagrin, and rage. He pleaded, argued, threatened; but he might as well have attempted to catch and restrain in the hollow of his hand the steady sweep of Niagara, as hope to change my purpose. My terms were fixed, and I gave him permission to tell the world what he chose concerning this strange *denouement* of the wedding feast. If I could only go away at once, I cared not what the public thought or said; and finally, finding me no longer a yielding child, but a desperate, stern, relentless woman, my terms were acceded to. Briefly we discussed the legal provisions, and I signed some hastily prepared papers that settled a bountiful annuity upon Mr. Carlyle. My trunks were sent to the steamer, the carriage was brought to the door, and in the presence of my guardian and the lawyer, I announced my desire never to look again upon the man who had so completely blighted my life. In silence I laid upon the table my betrothal and wedding rings, and the sparkling diamond cross that had constituted my bridal present. No word of reproach passed my lips, for women love when they upbraid, and only aching, fond hearts furnish stinging rebukes; but I hated and scorned the author of my ruin too utterly to indulge in crimination and reproach. So we two, who had just been pronounced man and wife, who had clasped hands and linked hearts and lives until we should stumble into the tomb,—we, Maurice Carlyle and Evelyn, his bride, four hours married, stood up and looked at each other for the last time. During the interview I had addressed no remark to him, and the last words I ever uttered to him were contained in that sentence fondly whispered when he bent over me at the table, 'Maurice, my king.' As I bade adieu to my guardian, and paused before the princely figure whom the world called my husband, our eyes met, and he flushed, and muttered, 'You will rue your rashness.' Silently I looked on the handsome features that had so suddenly grown loathsome to me, and he snatched my wedding

Digitized by Google

ring from the table and held it appealingly towards me, saying remorsefully, 'Evelyn, my wife, forgive your wretched husband!' Without a word, or a touch of his outstretched hands, I turned and went down to the carriage, where my faithful nurse sat weeping and waiting. One hour later, the vessel swung from her moorings, and Elsie and I were soon at sea. A girl only sixteen, four hours married, separated forever from husband and friends, — without hope or faith in either human or heavenly things, — hating, with most intolerable intensity, the man whose name she had just assumed, and to whom she felt indissolubly bound, in accordance with the vow '*So long as ye both shall live.*'"

Out of the tossing, moaning sea, the moon had risen slowly, breaking through a rent scarf of cloud that barred her solemn, white disc, and silvering the foam of the racing waves that seemed to reflect the glittering fringe of the scudding vapor in the chill vault above them. There was no mellow radiance, no golden lustre such as southern moons are wont to shed, but a weird, fitful glitter on sea and land, that now shone with startling vividness, and anon waned, until sombre shadows seemed stalking in spectral ranks from some distant, gloomy ocean lair. It was one of those melancholy nights when the supernatural realm threatened to impinge upon the physical, that shuddered and shrank from the contact, — when the atmosphere gave vague hints of ghostly denizens, and every passing breeze seemed laden with sepulchral damps and vibrating with sepulchral sounds.

Mrs. Gerome sat erect, with her hands resting on the balustrade, and under that mysteriously white moon her pearl-pale face looked as hopelessly cold and rigid as any Persepolitan sphinx, that nightly fronts the immemorial stars which watch the ruined tombs of Chilminar.

Raising her fingers to her forehead, she lifted and shook a bond of the shining white hair, and resumed her narration, in the same steady, passionless tone.

"These gray locks were the fruit of that bridal day, for, on the afternoon that we sailed, I was taken very ill with what was called congestion of the brain, — was unconscious throughout

Digitized by Google

the voyage, and when we reached Liverpool, my hair, once so black and glossy, was as you see it now. Ah! how often, since that time, have I heard poor Elsie mourning over my mother's untimely death, and quoting that ancient superstition, 'You should never wean a child while trees are in blossom; otherwise it will have gray hair.' Mr. Wright was so prostrated by grief at what had occurred, that he survived my departure only a few weeks; and at his death, Mr. Carlyle attempted to seize and control my estate. Urging the plea of my minority, he insisted upon assuming the charge of my property, and in order to consummate his avaricious designs, and screen his name from opprobrium, he told the world that I was hopelessly insane; and that the discovery of this fact, one hour after his marriage, had induced him to send me abroad under the care of a faithful and judicious nurse. To give plausibility to this statement, a paragraph was inserted in the New York papers announcing that I was a raving maniac and an inmate of an English asylum for lunatics. Mr. Clayton, my lawyer, was the sole surviving witness of my final interview, and of its financial provisions; and, had he yielded to bribes and threats which were unsparingly offered, God only knows what would have been my fate, since the tender mercies of my husband destined me to the cheerful and attractive precincts of a mad-house. To Mr. Clayton's stern integrity and brave defence, I am indebted for the preservation of my fortune and the defeat of a daring and iniquitous scheme to arrest me in London and commit me to the custody of an asylum-warden. Fortunately for me, he lived long enough to transfer to my own guardianship, when I attained my majority, the estate which had cost me every earthly hope. Six months after my departure from America I bade farewell to Europe, and plunged into the most remote and unfrequented portions of the East, where I wished to remain unknown and unnoticed. In a half-defiant and half-superstitious mood, I had assumed the talismanic and mystical name of Agla Gerome, with the faint hope that it might shield me from the intrigues and persecutions which I felt assured would always dog the steps of Evelyn Carlyle. Having appointed a cautious and

Digitized by Google

confidential agent in New York and Paris, I destroyed all traces of my whereabouts, and became as utterly lost to the world as though the portals of the grave had closed upon me. Without friends, and accompanied only by Elsie and her son Robert, I lived year after year in wandering through strange lands. Books and pictures were my solace, and to strangle time I first devoted myself to drawing and painting. After a while I came back to Rome, and frequented the studios and galleries, perfecting myself in the mechanical department of Art. But fear of encountering some familiar face drove me from the Eternal City, and a sudden whim took me to Madeira, where I spent the only portion of my life to which I recur with any degree of satisfaction. There, surrounded by magnificent scenery, and safe from intrusion, I intended to drag out the remainder of my dreary years; but poor Elsie grew so restless, so home-sick, so impatient to visit the graves of her household band, that I finally allowed myself to be persuaded into returning to my native land. Robert preceded us, and purchased this secluded spot, which I had stipulated must be upon the sea-shore and secure from all intrusion. Avoiding New York, I came reluctantly to Boston, thence to 'Solitude,' without seeing or hearing of any whom I had once known. When I was twenty-one, I transferred to Mr. Carlyle the sum of thirty thousand dollars, as a final settlement; but my agent scrupulously obeyed my instructions, and no human being, save himself, is aware of my place of residence or the name under which I am sheltered. Strenuous efforts have been made by Mr. Carlyle to unearth his wretched dupe, but since I left England, nearly eight years ago, he has been unable to discover any trace of my location. From time to time I received bills, contracted by him, and paid by my lawyer after I left New York; and in my escritoire are two accounts of jewellers, where I find charged the flashing ring and costly diamond cross, which I refused to retain but for which I paid, after my separation. Prone to dissipation, Mr. Carlyle plunged into excesses that would have squandered royal portions, and my agent writes that his eagerness to ascertain where I am residing has recently

Digitized by Google

increased, in consequence of his pecuniary necessities, although the terms of our separation deprive him of every shadow of claim upon me or my purse. Such, Dr. Grey, is the shattered idol of my girlish adoration, — such the divinity of dust upon which I spent the treasures of my love and trust. Gray-haired, gray-hearted, mocked, and maddened in the dawn of my confiding womanhood, nominally a wife, but in reality a nameless waif, shut out from happiness, and pitied as a maniac, — such, is that most desolate and isolated woman, whom, as Agla Gerome, you have known as the mistress of this lonely place. As for my name, I sometimes wonder whether in the last great gathering in the court of Heaven, my own mother will know what to call her unbaptized child, — whether the sins charged against me will be read out as those of Vashti, or Evelyn, or Agla. Elsie persistently clung to Vashti, and verily there seems a grim fitness in her selection, — a dismal analogy between my blasted life and that of the discrowned Persian Queen. Be that as it may, if I miss a name I surely shall not miss the equity that man denies me. '*So long as ye both shall live.*' When I look out in spring-time, over the blossoming earth, daisies, and violets, and primroses range themselves into lines that spell out these hated words of an ever-echoing vow, and if, in midnight hours, I raise my weary eyes, the sleepless stars revengefully group themselves, and flash back to me, in burning characters, '*Till death us do part.*' Up yonder, behind sun, and planet, and nebulæ, I shall look God in the face, and pointing to my withered heart and blighted life, can say truly, 'At least I kept the ruins free from perjury; there, at your feet, is the oath unsullied, that I called you to accept on the awful day when I knelt at your altar.' Love, honor, and obedience, Maurice Carlyle's unworthiness rendered impossible; but the vow which consecrated and set me apart, which forbade the thought that other men might offer homage and affection, or even ordinary tributes of admiration, I have kept sacredly and faithfully. I might have plunged into the whirlpool of fashionable life, and found temporary oblivion of my humiliation and disappointment; but from such a career my whole being

Digitized by Google

revolted, and in seclusion I have dragged out a dreary series of years that can scarcely be termed life. Recently I have been honored by several proposals for a divorce, on condition of an additional settlement of money upon my eminently chivalric and devoted husband; but my invariable reply has been, *human legislation is impotent to cancel the statutes of Almighty God, which declare that only death can free what Jehovah has joined together*, and the legal provisions of man crumble and shrivel before the divine command, '*For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth.*' With what impatience, what ceaseless yearning, I await the cold touch of that deliverer who alone can sever my galling, detested fetters, none but the God above us can understand and realize. The eagerness with which I once anticipated my bridal hour does not approximate the intensity of my longing for the day of my death. O merciful God! surely, surely, I have been sufficiently tortured, and the tardy release can not be far distant."

She raised her face skyward, as if invoking Divine aid, but her wan lips were voiceless; and only the song of the surf mingled with the whisper of trembling poplars, whose fading leaves gleamed ghostly and chill under the silver sheen of that broad white moon.

> "There heavily, across the troubled night,
> A warning comet trails her hideous hair,
> And underneath, the wroth sea-waves are white."

During the hour in which Dr. Grey listened to the recital of this woman's hapless career, she became as utterly dead to him as though shroud and sepulchre had already claimed her; and when she ceased speaking, he looked as sorrowfully down at her fair, frozen face, as if the coffin-lid were shutting it forever from his view.

Henceforth she was as sacred in his sad eyes as some beloved corpse, and bowing his head upon his hands, he prayed long but silently that God would strengthen him for the duties of a desolate future, — would sanctify this grievous disappointment to

Digitized by Google

his eternal welfare, and grant him power to lead heavenward the heart of the only woman whom he had ever desired to call his own.

Putting away the beautiful dreams wherein this regal form had moved to and fro as crown and queen of his home and heart, he calmly resigned the cherished scheme that linked this woman's life with his; and felt that he would gladly barter all his earthly hopes for the assurance, that, throughout eternity, he might be allowed the companionship which time denied him.

Mrs. Gerome rose, and folding her mantle around her, said proudly,—

"Married life, unhallowed by love, is more acceptable in your righteous eyes than my isolated existence; and you have passed sentence against me. So be it. Strange code of morality you Christians hug to your hearts, squeezing the form that holds no spirit; but some day I shall be acquitted by that incorruptible tribunal where God alone has the right to judge us. Till then, farewell."

She turned to leave the terrace, but he arrested the movement, and placed himself before her.

"You misinterpret my silence, if you suppose it was employed in censuring your course. Pondering all that you have recapitulated, I can conjecture no line of conduct towards your husband less deplorable than that which you have pursued; and I honor the stern honesty and integrity of purpose from which you have never swerved. Mrs. Carlyle, I acquit you of all guilt, save that of impious defiance, of rebellion against your God, whose grace could sweeten even the bitter dregs of the cup you have well nigh drained."

At the sound of her name, so long unuttered, she winced and writhed as if some sensitive nerve had been suddenly pierced and torn; but without heeding her emotion, Dr. Grey continued,—

"If your earthly lot has been stinted of sunshine, can you not bear a little temporary gloom,—must you needs people it with adverse witnesses, must you thicken the darkness with imprecations? You forget that life is only the race-course, not

Digitized by Google

the goal, — that this world is for human souls what the plain of Dura proved for the Hebrew trio who braved its flames. Suppose you are lonely and bereft of the love that might have cheered you? Was not Christ far more isolated and love less? In His fearful ordeal He was forsaken by God, — but to you remains the everlasting promise, 'I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.' O wretched woman! give your aching heart to Him who emptied it of earthly idols in order to fit it up for His own temple.

> 'Is God less God, that thou art left undone?
> Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun,
> As in that purple.'"

Silently she listened, looking steadily up at his noble face, where intense mental anguish had left unwonted pallor, and printed new ciphers on brow and lips; and when his adjuration ended, she put out her hand.

"That you do not condemn me is the most precious consolation you could offer, for your good opinion is worth much to my proud, sensitive soul. If all men were like you there would be no mutilated, ruined lives, such as mine, — no nominal wives roaming up and down the world in search of an obscure corner wherein to hide dishonored heads and crushed hearts. God grant you some day a wife worthy of the noblest man it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Good-by."

He did not accept the offered hand, and stood for a moment as if struggling to master some impulse to which he could not yield. Perhaps he dared not trust the touch of those gleaming, slender fingers that had clasped a living husband's; or perchance he was so absorbed by painful thoughts that he failed to observe them.

Laying his palm softly on her snowy head, he said tenderly, —

"Mrs. Carlyle, you have innocently, and I believe unconsciously, caused me the keenest suffering I have ever endured; and I feel assured you will not withhold the only reparation which you could render, or I accept. Will you promise to

Digitized by Google

consecrate the remainder of your life to the service of Christ? Will you humble your defiant soul, and so spend your future, that when this brief earthly pilgrimage ends you can pass joyfully to the city of Rest? Girded with this hope, I can brave all trials, — can be content to look upon your face no more in this world, — can patiently wait for a reunion in that Eternal Home where they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage."

"Oh, Dr. Grey, if it were possible!"

She clasped her hands and bowed her chin upon them, awed by his tones, and unable to meet his grave, pleading eyes.

"Faith and prayer are the talismans that render all things possible to an earnest Christian; and it has been truly said We mount to heaven mostly on the ruins of our cherished schemes, finding our failures were successes.' Recollect,—

'There is a pleasure which is born of pain:
The grave of all things hath its violet,'

and do not indulge a corroding bitterness that has almost destroyed the nobler elements of your nature. I will exact no promise, but when I am gone, do not forget the request that my soul makes of yours. May God point out your work and help you to perform it faithfully. May His hand guide and uphold, and His merciful arms enfold you, now and forever, is and shall be my prayer."

For a moment his hand lingered as if in benediction upon the drooping gray head, then he quietly turned and walked away, knowing full well that he was bidding adieu to the most precious of all earthly objects,—that he too was shattering a lovely "graven image," before which his heart had fondly bowed.

As the sound of his firm step died away, the lonely woman lifted her face and looked after the form, vanishing in the gloom of the overarching trees. When he had disappeared, and she turned seaward, where the moon, as if inviting her to heaven, had laid a broad shining band of beaten silver

Digitized by Google

from wave to sky, — the miserable wife raised her hands appealingly, and made a new covenant with her pitying God.

. . . . . "Wherefore thy life
Shall purify itself, and heal itself,
In the long toil of love made meek by tears."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"MERTON, you are not conscious of the extent of your infatuation, which has already excited comment in our limited circle of acquaintances."

"Indeed! The members of 'our limited circle of acquaintances' are heartily welcome to whatever edification or amusement they may be able to derive from the discussion of my individual affairs, or the analysis of my peculiar tastes. You forget, my dear Constance, that to devour and in turn be devoured is an inexorable law of this world; and if my eccentricities furnish a *ragout* for omnivorous society, I should be philanthropically glad that tittle-tattledom owes me thanks."

The speaker did not lay aside the newspaper that partially concealed his countenance; and when he ceased speaking, his eyes reverted to the statistical table of Egyptian and Algerine cotton, which for some moments he had been attentively examining.

"My dear brother, you are spasmodically and provokingly philosophical! Pray do me the honor to discard that stupid *Times*, which you pore over as if it were the last sensation novel, and be so courteous as to look at me while you are talking," replied the invalid sister, beating a tattoo on the side of her couch.

"I believe I have nothing to communicate just now," was the quiet and unsatisfactory answer, as he drew a pencil from his pocket and made some numeral annotations on the margin of the statistics.

Digitized by Google

"Surely, Merton, you are not angry with your poor Constance?"

Merton Minge lowered his paper, restored the pencil to his vest pocket, and wheeling his chair forward, brought himself closer to the couch.

"I wish you were as far removed from fever as I certainly am from anger. Your eyes are too bright, my pretty one."

He put his fingers on her pulse, and when he removed them, compressed his lips to stifle a sigh.

"Why will you so persistently evade me?—why will you always change the subject when I allude to that young lady?"

"Because, when a man attains the sober and discreet age of forty years, he naturally and logically thinks he has earned, and is entitled to, an exemption from the petty teasing to which sophomores and sentimentalists are subjected. While I gratefully appreciate the compliment implied in your forgetfulness, permit me to remind you of the disagreeable fact that I am no longer a boy."

"You lose sight of that same ugly and ill-mannered fact, much more frequently than I am in danger of doing; and I affectionately suggest that you stimulate your own torpid memory. Ah, brother! why will you not be frank, and confide in me? Women are not easily hoodwinked, except by their lovers,—and you can not deceive me in this matter."

"What pleasure do you suppose it would afford me to practice deceit of any kind towards my only sister? To what class of motives could you credit such conduct?"

"I think you shrink from acknowledging your real feelings, because you very well know that I could never sanction or consent to them."

Mr. Minge arched his heavy brows, and the sternly drawn lines of his large mouth relaxed, and threatened to run into curves that belong to the ludicrous, as he turned his twinkling eyes upon his sister's face.

"What extraordinary hallucinations attack even sage, sedate, middle-aged men? Ten minutes ago I would have sworn I was your guardian; whereas, it seems your apron-strings are the

Digitized by Google

reins that rule me. Don't pout, my Czarina, if I demand your credentials before I bow submissively to your *ukase*."

"Irony is not your forte; and, Merton, I beg you to recollect that I detest bantering, — it is so excessively ungenteel. No wonder you look nervous and ashamed, after your recent very surprising manifestation of — well, I might as well say what I mean — of *mauvais goût*."

Constance Minge impatiently threw off the light worsted shawl that rested on her shoulders, and propped her cheek on her jewelled hand.

Her brother's countenance clouded, and his lips hardened, but after one keen look at her flushed features, he once more resumed the perusal of the paper. Some moments elapsed, and his sister sobbed, but he took no notice of the sound.

"Merton, I never expected you would treat me so cruelly."

"Make out your charges in detail, and when you are sure you have included all the petty deeds of tyranny as well as the heinous acts of brutality, I will examine the indictment, and hear myself arraigned. Shall I bring you some legal cap, and loan you my pencil?"

For five minutes she held her handkerchief to her eyes, and then Mr. Minge rose and looked at his watch.

"You will not be so unkind as to leave me again this afternoon, and spend your time with that — "

"Constance, you transcend your privileges, and this is a most *apropos* and convenient occasion to remind you that presumption is one fault I find it particularly difficult to forgive. Since my forbearance only invites aggression, let me here say (as an economy of trouble), that you are rashly invading a realm where I permit none to enter, much less to dictate. I hope you understand me."

"I knew it, — I felt it! I dreaded that artful girl would make mischief between us, — would alienate the only heart I had left to care for me. Oh, how I wish she had been forty fathoms under the sea before you ever saw her! — before you ceased to love me!"

A flood of tears emphasized the sentence, which seemed lost

Digitized by Google

upon Mr. Minge, as he lighted a cigar, tried its flavor, threw it away, and puffed the smoke from a second.

"I am sorry you can't smoke and compose your nerves, as I am preparing to do, — though I confess I prefer to kiss your lips untainted by such odors. Shall I?"

He held his cigar aside to prevent the wind from wafting the curling column of smoke in her face, and bent his head close to hers; but she put up her hand to prevent the caress, and averted her face.

"As you like. But mark you, Constance, the next time our lips touch, you will find yourself in the nominative case, while I meekly fill an objective position. You are a poor, wilful, spoiled child, and I must begin to undo my own ruinous work."

He picked up his hat and walked off, followed by a pretty Italian mouse-colored greyhound, whose silver bell tinkled as she ran down the steps.

"Merton, come back! Do not leave me here alone, or I shall die. Brother! —"

On strode the stalwart figure, looking neither to right nor left, and behind him trailed the vaporous aroma of the fine cigar. Raising herself on her couch, the invalid elevated her voice, and exclaimed, —

"Please, dear Merton, come back, — at least long enough to let me kiss you. Please, brother!"

He paused, — wavered, — drew geometrical figures on the ground with the tip of his boot, and finally took off his hat, turned and bowed, saying, —

"Show some flag of truce, if you really want me to return."

She raised her hands and gracefully tossed him several kisses.

Slowly Mr. Minge retraced his steps, and, as he sat down once more close to his sister and pushed back his hat, she saw that he intended her to realize that her reign was at an end; and she trembled and turned pale at the expression with which he regarded her.

"Merton, don't you know — don't you believe — that I love you above everything else?"

Digitized by Google

She sat erect, and stole one arm around the neck that did not bend toward her, as was its habit.

"If you really loved me, you would desire to see me happy."

"I do desire it, earnestly and sincerely; and there is no sacrifice I would not make to see you really happy."

"Provided I selected your mode of obtaining the boon, and moreover consulted your caprices and antipathies; otherwise, my happiness would annoy and insult you."

"Don't scold,—kiss me." She put up her lips, but he did not respond to the motion, and she pettishly drew his head down and kissed him several times. "How obstinate you have grown!—how harsh towards me! It is all the result of that—"

She bit her lip, and her brother frowned.

"Take care! You seem continually disposed to stumble very awkwardly into forbidden realms."

The petted invalid nestled her pretty head on his bosom, and patted his cheek with one hot hand.

"Brother, Kate Sutherland was here this morning, and left—besides numerous kind messages for you—a three-cornered note that I ordered Adèle to place in your dressing-case, where I felt sure you would see it."

"Yes, I saw it."

"An invitation to ascend Monte Pellegrini?"

"Which I respectfully decline."

"O Merton! Why not go?"

"Simply because I never premeditatedly, and with *malice prepense*, bore myself by joining parties composed of persons in whom I have not an atom of interest."

"But Kate is so lovely?"

"Not to me."

"Nonsense! She was the handsomest young girl in Paris, and was the acknowledged belle of the season."

"Possibly. Henna-dyed nails are considered irresistible in Turkey, but your opalescent ones attract me infinitely more pleasantly"

"Pray what have my nails to do with Kate's beauty?"

Digitized by Google

"Nothing destructive, I hope,—as I am disposed to think she has little to spare."

"Good heavens! You surely would not insinuate that you believe or consider,—or would admit, that she is not vastly superior to—to—there, Beauty, down! She is actually dining on the fringe of my pelerine!"

To cover her confusion, Constance addressed herself to the diminutive dog at her feet, and taking her flushed face in his hands, the brother looked steadily down, and answered,—

"I never insinuate. It impresses me as a cowardly and contemptible bit of plebeian practice that found favor after the royal purple was trailed in agrarian democratic dust; and lest you should unjustly impute abhorred innuendoes to me, I will say perspicuously, that the most attractive and beautiful woman I have ever seen is not your fair friend Miss Sutherland, nor any other darling of diamond and satin sheen, but a young lady whom I admire beyond expression, Miss Salome Owen."

An angry flush burned on the invalid's face, and her mouth curled scornfully.

"She is rather handsome sometimes,—so are gypsies and other waifs; but it is a wild sort of beauty,—if beauty you persist in terming it; and low birth and blood are visible in everything that appertains to her. I never expected to see my brother condescend to the level of opera-singers, and I am astonished at your infatuation. There! you need not expect to blast me with that fiery look, and besides, you know you mentioned her name, which I had scrupulously avoided. I confess I am very proud of my family, and of you, its sole male representative, and I wish it preserved from all taint."

"Untainted it shall remain, while a drop of the blood throbs in my veins, and I, who am jealous of my honor, have carefully pondered the matter, and maturely decided that he who entrusts his happiness to Salome Owen will be indeed an enviable man, and pardonably proud of his prize. Once I bartered myself away at the altar, and gave my name and hand for wealth, for aristocratic antecedents, for fashionable status, and five

Digitized by Google

years of purgatorial misery was the richly merited penalty for the insult I offered my heart. Death freed me, and for ten years I have lived at least in peace, indulging no thought of a second alliance, and merely amused, or disgusted by the matrimonial snares that have lined my path. I no longer belong to that pitiable class who feel constrained to marry for position, and who convert the altar-steps into so many rounds of the social ladder; and I have earned the right to indulge my outraged heart in any caprice that promises to mellow, to gild the evening of my life with that home-sunshine that was denied its gloomy tempestuous morning. My future, my fortune, my social standing, my unblemished name, are all my own,—and I shall exercise my privilege of bestowing them where and when I please, heedless of the sneers and howls of disappointed mercenary schemers. Come weal, come woe, I here announce that neither you nor the world need hope to influence me one 'jot or tittle' in an affair where I allow no impertinent interference. I warn you this is the last time I shall permit even an indirect allusion to matters with which you have no legitimate concern; and provided you do not obtrude them upon me, it is a question of indifference to me what your opinion and that of your 'circle' may chance to be. Constance, you here have your ultimatum. Defy me, if you please, but prompt separation will ensue; and you will unexpectedly find yourself *en route* for America. Peace or war? Before you decide, recollect that all your future will be irretrievably colored by it."

"In my state of health it is positively cruel for you to threaten me; and some day when you follow my coffin to Mount Auburn, you will repent your harshness. I wish to heaven I had never left home!"

A passionate fit of weeping curtailed the sentence, and, while the face was covered with the lace handkerchief, the brother rose and made his escape.

Despite the fact that forty years had left their whitening touches on his head and luxuriant beard, Merton Minge, who had never been handsome, even in youth, was sufficiently

Digitized by Google

agreeable in appearance to render him an object of deep interest in the circle where he moved. Medium-statured, and very robust, a healthful ruddy tinge robbed his complexion of that sallow hue which mercantile pursuits are apt to induce, and brightened the deep-set black eyes which his debtors considered mercilessly keen, cold, and incisive.

The square face, with its broad, full forehead, and deep curved furrow dividing the thick straight brows, — its well-shaped but prominent nose, and massive jaws and chin partially veiled by a grizzled beard that swept over his deep chest, — was suggestive of ledgers rent-roll, and stock-boards, rather than æsthetics, chivalry, or sentimentality. The only son of a proud but impoverished family, who were eager to retrieve their fortune, he had early in life married the imperious spoiled daughter of a Boston millionaire, whose dower consisted of five hundred thousand dollars, and a temper that eclipsed the unamiable exploits of ancient and modern shrews.

Hopeless of domestic happiness in a union to which affection had not prompted him, Mr. Minge devoted himself to the rapid accumulation of wealth, and by judicious and successful specu lations had doubled his fortune, ere, at the comparatively early age of thirty, he was left a childless widower. Whether he really thanked fate for his timely release, his most intimate friends were never able to ascertain, for he wore mourning, badges for three years, and conducted himself in all respects with exemplary dignity and scrupulous propriety. But the frigid indifference with which he received all matrimonial overtures indicated that his conjugal experience was not so rosy as to tempt him to repeat the experiment.

His mother was a haughty, frivolous woman, jealously tenacious of her position as one of the oligarchs of *le beau monde*, and his fragile sister had from childhood been the victim of rheumatism that frequently rendered her entirely helpless. To these two and their fashionable friends, he abandoned his elegant home, costly equipages, and opera-box, reserving only a suite of rooms, his handsome riding-horse, and yacht.

Grave and unostentatious, yet not moody, — neither impul-

Digitized by Google

sively liberal and generous nor habitually penurious and uncharitable, — he led a quiet and monotonously easy life, varied by occasional trips to foreign lands, and comforted by the assurance that his income-tax was one of the heaviest in the state. Two years after the death of his mother, he took his sister a second time to Europe, hoping that the climate of the Levant might relieve her suffering; and upon the steamer in which he crossed the Atlantic he met Salome Owen.

Extravagantly fond of music, though unable to extract it from any instrument, his attention had first been attracted by her exquisite voice, which invested the voyage with a novel charm and rendered her a great favorite with the passengers.

Human nature is wofully inflexible and obstinate, and not all the Menus, Zoroasters, Solomons, and Platos have taught it wisdom; wherefore it is not surprising that a caustic wit and savage cynic asserts, "The vices, it may be said, await us in the journey of life like hosts with whom we must successively lodge; and I doubt whether experience would make us avoid them if we were to travel the same road a second time."

Habit may be second nature, but it is the Gurth, the thrall of the first, — the vassal of inherent impulses; and even the most ossified natures contain some soft palpitating spot that will throb against the hand that is sufficiently dexterous to find it. In every man and woman there lurks a vein of sentiment, which, no matter how heavily crushed by the superincumbent mass of utilitarian, practical commonplaceisms, will one day trickle through the dusty *débris*, and creep like a silver thread over the dun waste of selfishness; or, Arethusa-like, burst forth suddenly after long subterranean wandering.

For forty years it had crawled silently and sluggishly under the indurated and coldly egoistic nature of Merton Minge, — had been dammed up at times by avarice and at others by grim recollections of his domestic infelicity; but finally, after tedious meandering in the Desert of Heartlessness, it struggled triumphantly to the surface one glorious autumn night, when a golden moon illumined the Atlantic waves and kindled a be-

Digitized by Google

witching beauty in the face of Salome, who sat on deck, singing an impassioned strain from *La Favorite*.

Her silvery voice was the miraculous rod that smote his petrified affections, and a wellspring of tenderness gushed forth, freshening, softening, and clothing with verdure and bloom his arid, sterile, stony temperament. Long-buried dreams of his boyhood stirred in their chilly graves and flitted dimly before him, and a hope that had slumbered so soundly he had utterly ignored its memory, started up, eager and starry-eyed, as in the college days of eld, — the precious hope, underlying all other emotions in a man's heart, that one day he too would be loved and prayed for by a pure womanly heart, and pure, sweet, womanly lips.

Fifteen years before, he had vowed "to cherish," not the haughty girl whose hand he clasped, but the five hundred thousand dollars that gilded it; and faithfully he had kept his oath to the god of his idolatry, sacrificing the best half of his life to insatiate *Kuvera*.

On that cloudless October night, as he watched the shimmer of the moon on Salome's silky hair, and noted the purely oval outline of her daintily carved face, and the childish grace of her fine form, — as he listened to flute-like tones, as irresistible as Parthenope's, his cold, formal, non-committal mouth stirred, his hand involuntarily opened and closed firmly, as if grasping some "pearl of great price," and his slow, almost stagnant pulses, leaped into feverish activity, and soon ran riot. Perhaps more regular features, and deeper, richer carnation bloom had confronted him, but love makes sad havoc of ideals and abstract standards, and he who defined beauty, "the woman I love," was wiser than Burke and more analytical than Cousin.

The freshness, the *brusquerie*, the outspoken honesty, that characterized Salome, strangely fascinated this grave, selfish, *blasé* aristocrat, who was weary of hollow, polished conventionalities and stereotyped society phrases; and, as he sat on deck watching her countenance, he would have counted out his fortune at her feet for the privilege of claiming her fair, slender hand,

Digitized by Google

and her tremulous, scarlet lips, instinct with melody that entranced him.

Henceforth life had a different goal, a nobler aim, a tenderer and more precious hope; and all the energy of his vigorous character was bent to the fulfilment of the beautiful dream that one day that young girl would bear his name, grace his princely home, and nestle in his heart.

He did not ask, Can that fair, graceful, gifted young thing ever love a gray-haired man, old enough to call her his daughter? Nay, nay! Common sense was utterly dethroned and expelled, — romance usurped the realm, and draped the future with rainbows; and he only set his teeth firmly against each other, and said to his bounding heart and blinded soul, "Patience, ye shall soon possess her!"

To Paris, Lyons, Naples, he had followed her, and finally secured a villa at Palermo, where Prof. V—— had established himself and his household in a comfortable suite of rooms.

To-day, as he left his sister and approached the house where the professor dwelt, his countenance was moody and forbidding, but its expression changed rapidly, as he caught a glimpse of the white muslin dress that fluttered in the evening wind.

Salome was swiftly pacing the wide terrace that commanded a view of the Mediterranean, and her hands were clasped behind her, as was her habit when immersed in thought.

Over her head she had thrown a white gauze scarf of fringed silk, which, slipping back, displayed the elaborate braids of hair wound around the head, where a crescent of snowy hyacinths partially encircled the glossy coil, and drooped upon her neck.

Her face wore a haggard, anxious, restless expression, and the thin lips had lost their bright coral tint, — the smooth, clear cheeks something of their rounded perfection.

As Mr. Minge came forward, she paused in her walk and leaned against the marble railing of the terrace, where a lemon tree, white with bloom, overhung the mosaiced floor and powdered it with velvety petals.

He held out his hand.

"I hope I find you better?"

Digitized by Google

"Do I look so, think you?" said she, eyeing him impatiently, and keeping her hands folded behind her.

"Unfortunately, no; and if I possessed the right I have more than once solicited, other physicians should be consulted. Why will you tamper with so serious a matter, and unnecessarily augment the anxiety of those who love you?"

"I beg you to believe that my self-love is infinitely stronger than any other with which I am honored, and prompts me to all possible prudential precautions. Three doctors have already annoyed me with worthless prescriptions, and this morning I paid their bills and dismissed them; whereupon, one of them revenged himself by maliciously informing me that I should not be able to sing a note for one year at least.

"To what do they attribute the disease?"

"To that attack of scarlet fever, and also to the too frequent and severe cauterization of my throat. Time was when like other fond fools, I fancied Fate was not the hideous hag that wiser heads had painted her, but an affable old dame, easily cajoled and propitiated. With Carthaginian gratitude she repays my complimentary opinion by trampling my hopes and aims as I crush these petals, which yield perfume to their spoiler, while I could —"

She put her foot upon the drifting lemon blossoms, and bit her lip to keep back the bitter words that trembled on her tongue.

"Come and sit here on the steps, and confide your plans to one whose every scheme shall be subordinated to your wishes, your happiness."

Mr. Minge attempted to take her hand, but she drew back and repulsed him.

"Excuse me. I prefer to remain where I am; and when I am so fortunate and sagacious as to mature any plans, I shall be sure to lock them in my own heart beyond the tender mercies of meddling, marplot fortune."

Her whole face grew dark, sinister, almost dangerous in its sudden transformation, and, leaning against the railing, she impatiently swept off the snowy lemon leaves. Mr. Minge took

Digitized by Google

the end of her scarf, and as he toyed with the fringe, sighed heavily.

"Of course you are forced to abandon your contemplated *début* in Paris?"

"Yes. A *début* minus a voice, does not tempt me. Ah! how bright the future looked when I sang for the agent of the Opera-House, and found myself engaged for the season. How changed, how cheerless all things seem now."

"Salome, fate is Janus-faced, and while frowning on you smiles benignantly on me. I joyfully hail every obstacle that bars your path, hoping that, weary of useless resistance, you will consent to walk in the flowery one I have offered you. My beautiful darling, why will you refuse the —"

"Silence! I am in no mood to listen to a repetition of sentiments which, however flattering to my vanity, have no power to touch my heart. Mr. Minge, I have twice declined the offer you have done me the honor to make; and while proud of your preference, my Saxon is not so ambiguous or redundant as to leave any margin for misconception of my meaning."

"My dear Salome, I fear your decision has been influenced by the consciousness that my poor, petted Constance has occasionally neglected the courtesies which you had a right to claim from the sister of the man who seeks to make you his wife."

"No, sir; your sister's sneers, and the petty slights and persecutions for which I am indebted to her friend, Miss Sutherland, have not sufficient importance to affect me in any degree. My decision is based upon the unfortunate fact that I do not love you."

"No woman can withstand such devotion as I bring you, and time would soon soften and deepen your feelings."

"Sir, you unduly flatter yourself. Neither time nor eternity would change me, and you would do well to remember that it is my voice, sir, — not my hand and heart, — that I offer for sale."

"Your stubborn rejection is explicable only by the supposition that you have deceived me, — that you have already bartered away the heart I long to call my own."

Digitized by Google

"I am a miller's child, — you a millionnaire; but permit me to remind you that I allow no imputation on my veracity. Why should I condescend to deceive you?"

She petulantly snatched her scarf from the fingers that still strokod it caressingly; but an instant later a singular change swept over her countenance, and pressing her hands to her heart, she said in a proud, almost exultant tone, —

"Although I deny your right to question me upon this subject, you are thoroughly welcome to know that I love one man so entirely, so deathlessly, that the bare thought of marrying any one else sickens my soul."

Mr. Minge turned pale, and grasped the carved balustrade against which he rested.

"O Salome! you have trifled."

"No, sir. Take that back. I never stoop to trifling; and the curse of my life has been my almost fatal earnestness of purpose. If I ever deliberated one moment concerning the expediency of clothing myself first with your aristocratic name, afterwards with satin, velvet, and diamonds, — if I ever silenced the outcry of my heart long enough to ask myself whether *gilded misery* was not the least torturing type of the epidemic wretchedness, — at least I kept my parley with Mammon to myself; and if you obstinately cherished hopes of final success, they sprang from your vanity, not my dissimulation. Mark you, I here set up no claim to sanctity, — for indeed my sins are 'thick as leaves in Vallombrosa'; but my pedigree does not happen to link me with Sapphira, and deceit is not charged to me in the real Doomsday Book. Theft would be more possible for me than falsehood, for while both are labelled 'wicked,' I could never dwarf and shrivel my soul by the cowardly process of mendacity. Mr. Minge, had I been a trifle less honest and true than I find myself, I might have impaired my self-respect by trifling."

"Forgive me, Salome, if the pain I endure rendered me harsh or unjust. My dearest, I did not intend to wound you, but indeed you are cruel sometimes."

"Yes; truth is the most savagely cruel of all rude, jagged

Digitized by Google

weapons, and leaves ugly gashes and quivering nerves exposed; and these are the hurts that never cicatrize, — that gape and bleed while the heart throbs to feed them."

"Tell me candidly whether the heart I covet belongs to that Mr. Granville, who paid you such devoted attention in Paris."

A short, scornful, mirthless laugh rang sharply on the air, and turning quickly, Salome exclaimed contemptuously, —

"I said I loved a man, — a true, honest, brave, noble man, — not that perfumed, unprincipled, vain, foppish automaton, who adorns a corner of the diplomatic apartment where *attachés* of the American embassy 'most do congregate'! Gerard Granville is unworthy of any woman's affection, for maugre the indisputable fact that he is betrothed to a fond, trusting girl, now in the United States, he had the effrontery to attempt to offer his addresses to me. If an honest man be the noblest work of God, then, beyond all peradventure, the disgrace of creation is centred in an unscrupulous one, such as I have the honor to pronounce Mr. Granville."

Seizing her hands, Mr. Minge carried them forcibly to his lips, and said, in a voice that faltered from intensity of feeling, —

"Is it the hope that your love is reciprocated which bars your heart so sternly against my pleadings? Spare me no pangs, — tell me all."

She freed her fingers from his grasp, and retreating a few steps, answered with a passionate mournfulness which he never forgot, —

"If I were dowered with that precious hope, not all the crown jewels in Christendom and Heathendom could purchase it. Not the proudest throne on that continent of empires that lies yonder to the north, could woo me one hour from the only kingdom where I could happily reign, — the heart of the man I love. No — no — no! That hope is as distant as the first star up there above us, which has rent the blue veil of heaven to gaze pityingly at me; and I would as soon expect to catch that silver sparkle and fold it in my arms as dream that my affection could ever be returned. The only man I shall ever love

Digitized by Google

could not bend his noble, regal nature to the level of mine, and towers beyond me, a pinnacle of unapproachable purity and perfection. Ah, indeed, he is one of those concerning whom it has been grandly said: '*The truly great stand upright as columns of the temple whose dome covers all,— against whose pilfered sides multitudes lean, at whose base they kneel in times of trouble.*' Mr. Minge, it is despair that crouches at my heart, not hope that shuts its portals against your earnest petition; for a barrier wider, deeper than a hundred oceans divides me from my idol, who loves, and ere this, is the husband of another."

She did not observe the glow that once more mantled his cheek, and fired his eyes, until he exclaimed with unusual fervor, —

"Thank God! That fact is freighted with priceless comfort."

Compassion and contempt seemed struggling for mastery, as she waved him from her, and answered, impatiently, —

"Think you that any other need hope to usurp my monarch's place, —that one inferior dare expect to wield his sceptre over my heart? Pardon me, —

> 'If there were not an eagle in the realm of birds,
> Must then the owl be king among the feathered herds?'

Some day a gentler spirit than mine will fill your home with music, and your heart with peace and sunshine; and, in that hour, thank honest Salome Owen for the blessings you owe to her candor. I must bid you good-night."

She drew the scarf closer about her head and throat, and turned to leave the terrace.

"Will you not allow me to drive you to-morrow afternoon on the Marino? Do not refuse me this innocent and inexpressibly valued privilege. I will not be denied! Good-night, my— Heaven shield you, my worshipped one! Hush!—I will hear no refusal."

He stooped, kissed the folds of the scarf that covered her head, and hurried down the steps of the terrace.

The glory of a Sicilian sunset bathed the face and figure that stood a moment under the lemon-boughs, watching the retreat-

Digitized by Google

ing form which soon disappeared behind clustering pomegranate, olive, and palm; and a tender compassion looked out of the large hazel eyes, and sat on the sad lips that murmured, —

"God help you, Merton Minge, to strangle the viper that coils in your heart, and gnaws its core. My own is a serpent's lair, and I pity the pangs that rend yours also. But after a little while, your viper will find a file, — mine, alas! not until death arrests the slow torture. To-morrow afternoon I shall be — where? Only God knows."

She shivered slightly, and raised her beautiful eyes towards the west, where golden gleams and violet shadows were battling for possession of a reef of cloud islets, which dotted the azure upper sea of air, and were reflected in the watery sea beneath.

"Courage! courage!

'Those who have nothing left to hope,
Have nothing left to dread.'"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"MURIEL, where can I find Miss Dexter?"

"She went out on the lawn an hour ago, to regale herself with what she calls, 'atmospheric hippocrene,' and I have not heard her come in, though she may have gone to her room. Pray tell me, doctor, why you wish to see my governess? — to inquire concerning my numerous peccadilloes?"

Muriel adroitly folded her embroidered silk apron over a package of letters that lay in her lap, and affected an air of gayety at variance with her dim eyes and wet lashes.

"I shall believe that conscience accuses you of many juvenile improprieties, since you so suspiciously attack my motives and intentions. Indeed, little one, you flatter yourself unduly, in imagining that my interview with Miss Dexter necessarily involves the discussion of her pupil. I merely wish to enlist

Digitized by Google

her sympathy in behalf of one of my patients. Muriel, I would have been much more gratified if I had found you walking with her, instead of moping here alone."

"I am not moping."

The girl bit her full red lip, and strove to force back the rapidly gathering tears.

"At least you are not cheerful, and it pains me to see that anxious, dissatisfied expression on a face that should reflect only sunshine. What disturbs you? — the scarcity of Gerard's letters?"

Dr. Grey sat down beside his ward, and throwing her arms around his neck, she burst into a passionate flood of tears. The sudden movement uncovered the letters, which slipped down and strewed the carpet.

"Oh, doctor! I am very miserable!"

"Why, my dear child?"

"Because Gerard does not love me as formerly."

"What reason have you for doubting his affection?"

"He scarcely writes to me once a month, and then his letters are short and cold as icicles, and full of court gossip and fashion items, for which he knows I do not care a straw. Yesterday I received one, — the first I have had for three weeks, — and he requests me to defer our marriage at least six months longer, as he can not possibly come over in May, the time appointed when he was here."

She hid her face on her guardian's shoulder, and sobbed.

An expression of painful surprise and stern displeasure clouded Dr. Grey's countenance, as he smoothed the hair away from the girl's throbbing temples.

"Calm yourself, Muriel. If Gerard has forfeited your confidence, he is unworthy of your tears. Do you apprehend that his indifference is merely the result of separation, or have you any cause to attribute it to interest in some other person?"

"That is a question I can not answer."

"Can not, or will not?"

"I know nothing positively; but I fear something, which perhaps I ought not to mention."

Digitized by Google

"Throw aside all hesitancy, and talk freely to me. If Granville is either fickle or dishonorable, you should rejoice that the discovery has been made in time to save you from life-long wretchedness."

"If we were only married, I am sure I could win him back to me."

"That is a fatal fallacy, that has wrecked the happiness of many women. If a lover grows indifferent, as a husband he will be cold, unkind, unendurable. If as a devoted *fiancée* you can not retain and strengthen his affection, — as a wife you would weary and repel him. Have you answered the last letter?"

"No, sir."

"My dear child, do you not consider me your best friend?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then yield to my guidance, and follow my advice. Lose no time in writing to Mr. Granville, and cancel your engagement. Tell him he is free."

"Oh, then I should lose him, — and happiness, forever!" wailed Muriel, clasping her hands almost despairingly.

"You have already lost his heart, and should be unwilling to retain him in fetters that must be galling."

"Ah, Dr. Grey! it is very easy for you who never loved any one, to tell me, in that cold, business-like way, that I ought to set Gerard free; but you can not realize what it costs to follow your counsel. Of course I know that in everything else you are much wiser than I, but persons who have no love affairs of their own are not the best judges of other people's. He is so dear to me, I believe it would kill me to give him up, and see him no more."

"On the contrary, you would survive much greater misfortune than separation from a man who is unworthy of you. I can not coerce, but simply counsel you in this matter, and should be glad to learn what your own decision is. Do you intend to wait until Gerard Granville explicitly requests you to release him from his engagement?"

She winced, and the tears gushed anew.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, you are cruel! You are heartless!"

"No, my dear Muriel; I am actuated by the truest affection for my little ward, and desire to snatch her from future humiliation. My knowledge of human nature is more extended, more profound than yours, but since you seem unwilling to avail yourself of my experience, it only remains for you to acquaint me with your determination. Are you willing to tell me the nature of your answer?"

"I intend to accede to Gerard's wish, and will defer the marriage until November; but in the meantime, I shall endeavor to win back his heart, which I believe has been artfully enticed from me."

"By whom?"

She made no reply, and lifting her head from his shoulder, Dr. Grey looked keenly into her face, and repeated his question.

"Do not urge me to express suspicions that may possibly be unjust."

"That are entirely unjust, you may rest assured," said he, almost vehemently.

"By what means did you so positively ascertain that fact?"

"The result will prove. Now, my dear child, you must acquit me of heartlessness and cruelty when I tell you, that, under existing circumstances, I can not and will not consent to the solemnization of your marriage until you are of age. Once the conviction that an earlier consummation of your engagement was essential to the happiness of both parties, overruled the dictates of my judgment, and induced me to acquiesce in your wishes; but subsequent events have illustrated the wisdom of my former opposition, and now I am resolved that no argument or persuasion shall prevail upon me to sanction or permit your marriage until you are twenty-one."

With a sharp cry of chagrin and amazement, Muriel sprang to her feet.

"You surely do not mean to keep me in this torture, for nearly three years? I will not submit to such tyranny, even from Dr. Grey."

"As a faithful guardian, I can see no alternative, and fear of

Digitized by Google

incurring your displeasure shall not deter me from the performance of a stern duty to the child of my best and dearest friend. I must and will do what your father certainly would, were he alive. My dear Muriel, control yourself, and do not, by harsh epithets and unjust accusations, wound the heart that sincerely loves you. To-day, as your guardian, I hearken to the imperative dictates of my conscience, and turn a deaf ear to the pleadings of my tender affection, which would save you from even momentary sorrow and disappointment. Since my decision is irrevocable, do not render the execution of my purpose more painful than necessity demands."

Seizing his hand, Muriel pressed it against her flushed cheek, and pleaded falteringly,—

"Do not doom your poor little Muriel to such misery. Oh, Dr. Grey! dear Dr. Grey, remember you promised my dying father to take his place,—and he would never inflict such suffering on his child. You have forgotten your promise!"

"No, dear child. It is because I hold it so sacred that I can not yield to your entreaties; and I must faithfully adhere to my obligations, even though I forfeit your affection. I shall write to Mr. Granville by the next mail, and it is my wish that henceforth the subject should not be referred to. Cheer up, my child; three years will soon glide away, and at the expiration of that time you will thank me for the firmness which you now denounce as cruelty. Good-morning. Be sure to think kindly of your guardian, whose heart is quite as sad as your own."

She struggled and resisted, but he kissed her lightly on the forehead, and as he left the room heard her bitter invectives against his tyranny and hard-heartedness.

Crossing the elm-studded lawn, he approached a secluded walk, bordered with lilacs and myrtle, and saw the figure of the governess pacing to and fro.

During the four months that had elapsed since his last visit to "Solitude," he scrutinized and studied her character more closely than formerly, and the investigation only heightened and intensified his esteem.

No hint of her history had ever passed the calm, patient lips,

Digitized by Google

which had forgotten how to laugh, and now, as he watched her pale, melancholy face, which bore traces of extraordinary beauty, he exonerated her from all blame in the ruinous deception that had blasted more lives than one; and honored the silent heroism which so securely locked her disappointment in her own heart. He knew that consumption was the hereditary scourge of her family, that she bore in her constitution the seeds of slowly but surely developing disease, and did not marvel at the quiet indifference with which she treated symptoms which he had several times pointed out as serious and dangerous.

To-day her manner was excited, and her step betrayed very unusual impatience.

"Miss Dexter, from the frequency of your cough I am afraid you are imprudent in selecting this walk, which is so densely shaded that the sun does not reach it until nearly noon. Are not your feet damp?"

"No, sir; my shoes are thick, and thoroughly protect them."

She paused before him, and, in her soft, brown eyes, he saw a strange, unwonted restlessness,—an eager expectancy that surprised and disturbed him.

"Are you at leisure this morning?"

"Do you need my services immediately?"

She answered evasively; and he noticed that she glanced anxiously toward the road leading into town.

"You will greatly oblige me, if some time during the day, you will be so good as to superintend the preparation of some calves'-feet jelly, for one of my poor patients. I would not trouble you, but Rachel is quite sick, and the new cook does not understand the process. May I depend upon you?"

"Certainly, sir; it will afford me pleasure to prepare the jelly."

Looking more closely at her face, he saw undeniable traces of recent tears, and drew her arm through his.

"I hope you will not deem me impertinently curious if I beg you to honor me with your confidence, and explain the anxiety which is evidently preying upon your mind."

Digitized by Google

Embarrassment flushed her transparent cheek, and her shy eyes glanced up uneasily.

"At least, Miss Dexter, permit me to ask whether Muriel is connected with the cause of your disquiet?"

"My pupil is, I fear, very unhappy; but she withholds much from me since she learned my disapproval of her approaching marriage."

"Will you acquaint me with your objections to Mr. Granville?"

Against Mr. Granville, the gentleman, I have nothing to urge; but I could not consent to see Muriel wed a man, who, I am convinced, has no affection for her."

"Have you told her this?"

"Repeatedly; and, of course, my frankness has offended and alienated her. Oh, Dr. Grey! the child totters on the brink of a flower-veiled precipice, and will heed no warning. Perhaps I should libel Mr. Granville were I to impute mercenary motives to him,—perhaps he fancied he loved Muriel when he addressed her,—I hope so, for the honor of manhood; but the glamour was brief, and certainly he must be aware that he has not proper affection for her now."

"And yet, she is very lovable and winning."

"Yes,—to you and to me; but her good qualities are not those which gentlemen find most attractive. What is Christian purity and noble generosity of soul, in comparison with physical perfection? Muriel often reminds me of one whom I loved devotedly, whose unselfish and unsuspicious nature wrought the ruin of her happiness; and from her miserable fate I would fain save my pupil."

He knew from the tremor of her lips and hands, and the momentary contraction of her fair brow, to whom she alluded; and both sighed audibly.

"My convictions coincide so entirely with yours, that I have had an interview with my ward, and withdrawn my consent to her marriage until she is of age."

"Thank God! In the interim she may grow wiser, or some fortuitous occurrence may avert the danger we dread."

Digitized by Google

In the brief silence that ensued, the governess seemed debating the expediency of making some revelation; and, encountering one of her perplexed and scrutinizing glances, the doctor smiled and said, gravely,—

"I believe I understand your hesitancy; but I assure you I should never forfeit any trust you might repose in me. You have some cause of serious annoyance, entirely irrespective of my ward, and I may be instrumental in removing it."

"Thank you, Dr. Grey. For some days I have been canvassing the propriety of asking your advice and assistance; and my reluctance arose not from want of confidence in you, but from dread of the pain it would necessarily inflict upon me, to recur to events long buried. It is not essential, however, that I should weary you with the minutiæ of circumstances which many years ago smothered the sunshine in my life, and left me in darkness, a lonely and joyless woman. I have resided here long enough to learn the noble generosity of your character, and to you, as a true Christian gentleman, I come for aid,—premising only that what I am about to say is strictly confidential."

"As such, I shall ever regard it; but if I am to become your coadjutor in any matter, let me request that nothing be kept secret, for only entire frankness should exist between those who have a common aim."

A painful flush tinged her cheek, and the fair, thin face, grew indescribably mournful, as she clasped her hands firmly over his arm.

"Dr. Grey, when unscrupulous men or women deliberately stab the happiness of a fellow-creature, they have no wounded sensibilities, no haunting compunction,—and if remorse finally overtakes, it finds them well-nigh callous and indurated; but woe to that innocent being who is the unintentional and unconscious agent for the ruin of those she loves. I can not remember the time when I did not love the only man for whom I ever entertained any affection. He was the playmate of my earliest years,—the betrothed of my young maidenhood,—and just before my poor father died, he joined our hands and left

Digitized by Google

his blessing on my choice. Poverty was the only barrier to our union, but I took a situation as teacher, and hoarded my small gains in the hope of aiding my lover, who went abroad with a wealthy uncle, and completed his education in Germany. I knew that Maurice had contracted very extravagant and self-indulgent habits,—but in the court of love is there any 'high crime' or misdemeanor for which a woman's heart will condemn her idol? Nay, nay; she will plead his defence against the stern evidence of her own incorruptible reason; and, if need be, share his punishment,—die in his stead. I denied myself every luxury, and jealously husbanded my small salary, anticipating the happy hour when we might invest it in furniture for our little home; and, indeed, in those blessed days of hope, it seemed no hardship,—

'And joy was duty, and love was law.'

From time to time our marriage was deferred, but I well knew I was beloved, and so I waited patiently, until fortune should smile upon me. In the interim I became warmly attached to a young girl in the school where I taught, and whose affection for me was enthusiastic and ardent. Evelyn was an orphan, and the heiress of enormous wealth, which she seemed resolved to share with me; and, more than once, I was tempted to acquaint her with the obstacle that debarred me from happiness. Ah! if I had only confided in her, and trusted her faithful love, how much wretchedness would have been averted! But she appeared to me such an impulsive child that I shrank from unburdening my heart to her, while she acquainted me with every thought and aim of her pure, guileless life. She was singularly, almost idolatrously fond of me, and I loved her very sincerely, for her character was certainly the most admirable I have ever met.

"At vacation we parted for three months, and I hurried to meet my lover, who had promised to join me in Vermont, where my mother had gone to recruit her failing health. For the first time Maurice proved recreant, and wrote that imperative business detained him in New York. Did I doubt him,

Digitized by Google

even then? Not in the least; but endeavored by cheerful letters to show him how patiently I could bear the separation that might result in pecuniary advantage to him. My mother looked anxious, and foreboded ill; but I laughed at her misgivings, and proudly silenced her warning voice. In the midst of my blissful dream came a lengthy telegraphic dispatch from my young girl-friend Evelyn, inviting me to hasten to New York, and accompany her on a bridal tour through Europe. In a brief and almost incoherent note, subsequently received, she accidentally omitted the name of her future husband, and designated him as 'my prince,' 'my king,' 'my liege lover.' The same mail brought me a long and exceedingly tender letter from my own betrothed, informing me that at the expiration of ten days he would certainly be with me to arrange for an immediate consummation of our engagement. A railroad accident delayed me twenty-four hours, and I did not reach New York until the morning of the day on which my friend was married. The ceremony took place at ten o'clock, and when I arrived, Evelyn was already in the hands of the hair-dresser. I was hurried into the room prepared for me, and while waiting for my trunk, noticed a basket containing some of the wedding cards. I picked up one, and you can perhaps imagine my emotions, when I saw that my own lover was the betrothed of my friend. Dr. Grey, eight miserable years have gone wearily over my head since then, but now, in the dead of night, if I shut my eyes, I see staring at me, like the rayless, glazed orbs of the dead, that silver-edged wedding card, bearing in silver letters — Maurice Carlyle, Evelyn Flewellyn. Oh, blacker than ten thousand death-warrants! for all the hopes of a lifetime went down before it. Every ray of earthly light was extinguished in a night of woe that can have no dawn, until the day-star of eternity shimmers on its gloom."

She shuddered convulsively, and the agonized expression of her face was so painful to behold that her companion averted his head.

"I was alone with my misery, and so overwhelming was the shock that I fainted. When the hair-dresser came to offer her

Digitized by Google

services, she found me lying insensible on the carpet. How bitterly, how unavailingly, have I reproached myself for my failure to hasten to Evelyn, even then, and divulge all. But with returning consciousness came womanly pride, and I resolved to hide the anguish for which I knew there was no cure. As soon as I was dressed, we were summoned down stairs to meet the remainder of the bridal party, and there I saw the man whom I expected to call my husband talking gayly with his attendants.

"Evelyn impetuously presented me as her 'dearest friend,' and, without raising his eyes, he bowed profoundly and turned away. How I endured all I was called to witness that morning, I know not; but my strength seemed superhuman. The ceremony was performed in church, and after our return to the house, Mr. Carlyle asserted and claimed the right to kiss the bridesmaids. There were four, and I was the last whom he approached. I was standing in the shadow of the window-curtain, which I had clutched for support, and, as he came close to me, our eyes met for the first time that day, and I can never, never forget the pleading mournfulness, the passionate tenderness, the despair, that filled his. I waved him from me, but he seized my hand, and pressed his hot lips lingeringly to mine. Then he whispered, 'My only love, my own Edith, do not judge till you hear your wretched Maurice. Meet me in the hot-house when Evelyn goes to change her dress, and I will explain this awful, this accursed necessity.' A few moments later he stood with his bride at the head of the table in the breakfast-room, while I was placed close to Evelyn, and the mirror opposite reflected the group. I know now it was sinful, but, oh! how could I help it? As I looked at the reflection in the glass, and compared my face with that of the bride, I felt my poor wicked heart throb with triumph at the thought that my superior beauty could not soon be forgotten,—that, though her husband, he was still my lover. Dr. Grey, do not despise me for my weakness, as I should have despised him for his perfidy; and remember that a woman can not in a moment renounce allegiance to a man who is the one love of her life.

Digitized by Google

They forced me to drink some wine that fired my brain and made me reckless, and an hour after, when Maurice came up and offered his arm, inviting me to promenade for a few minutes in the hot-house, I yielded and accompanied him. He told me a tale of dishonorable financial transactions, into which he had been betrayed solely by the hope of obtaining money that would enable him to hasten our union; but the utter failure of the scheme threatened him with disgrace, possibly with imprisonment, and the only mode of preserving his name from infamy, was to possess himself of Evelyn's large fortune. Just as he clasped me in his arms, and vehemently declared his deathless affection for me,—his contempt and hatred of his poor childish bride,—I heard a strange sound that was neither a wail nor a laugh, a sound unlike any other that ever smote my ears, and looking up, I saw Evelyn standing before us."

Miss Dexter groaned aloud, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"Oh, my God! help me to shut out that horrible vision! If I could forget that distorted, deathlike face, with livid lips writhing away from the gleaming teeth, and desperate, wide eyes, glaring like globes of flame! She looked twenty years older, and from her clenched hands,—her beautiful, exquisite hands,—that were wont to caress me so tenderly, the blood was dripping down on her lace veil and her white velvet bridal dress. How much she heard I know not, for I never saw her again. I swooned in Maurice's arms, and was carried to my own room; and when I finally groped my way to Evelyn's apartment, they told me she had been gone two hours,—had sailed for Europe, leaving her husband in New York. What passed in her farewell interview with him none but he and her lawyer knew; but they separated there on condition that his debts were cancelled. She went abroad with a faithful old Scotch woman who had been her nurse, and her husband told the world she was a maniac."

"Did he tell you so? Did you believe it?" exclaimed Dr. Grey, with a degree of vehemence that startled the governess.

"I have never seen Maurice Carlyle since that awful hour in

Digitized by Google

the hot-house. He came repeatedly to my home, but I refused to meet him, and dozens of his letters have been returned unopened. Once, while I was absent, he obtained an interview with my mother, and besought her intercession in his behalf, pleading for my pardon, and assuring her that, as his wife was hopelessly insane, he would apply for a divorce, and then claim the hand of the only woman he had ever loved. I dreaded the effect upon Evelyn, and had no means of ascertaining her real condition. Soon after, I lost my mother, whose death was hastened by grief and humiliation; and, when I had laid her down beside my father, I went in search of Evelyn. Several times I had attempted to communicate with her, and with Elsie, the nurse, but my letters always came back unopened, and bearing the London stamp. Having been informed that she was in an insane asylum in England, I took the money that had been so carefully hoarded for a different purpose and went to London. One by one, I searched all the asylums in the United Kingdom, and finding no trace of her, came back to America. Finally, on the death-bed of Mr. Clayton, her lawyer, who understood my great anxiety to discover her, I was told in strict confidence that she was perfectly sane,—had never been otherwise,—but preferred that the false report in circulation should not be corrected, since her husband had set it in motion. I learned that she was well and pleasantly located somewhere in the East, but would never see the faces of either friends or foes, and absolutely refused all intercourse with her race. From one of her letters (which, a moment after, he burned in the grate) Mr. Clayton read me a paragraph: '*The greatest mercy you can show me is to allow me to forget. Henceforth mention no more the names of any I ever knew; and let silence, like a pall, shroud all the past of Vashti.*' He died next day, and since then—"

The sad, sweet voice, which for some moments had been growing more and more unsteady, here sank into a sob, and the governess wept freely, while her whole frame shook with the violence of long-pent anguish, that now defied control.

"Oh, if I could find her! If I could go to her and tell her all, and exonerate myself! If I could show her that he was

Digitized by Google

mine always, — mine long before she ever saw him, — then she would not think so harshly of me. I know not what explanation Maurice gave her, nor how much of our conversation she overheard; and I can not live contentedly, — oh! I can not die in peace till I see my poor crushed darling, and hear from her lips the assurance that she does not hold me responsible for her wretchedness. Dr. Grey, I love her with a pitying tenderness that transcends all power of expression. Perhaps if Maurice had ever loved her, I could not feel as I do towards her; for a woman's nature tolerates no rival in the affection of her lover, and, unprincipled as mine proved in other respects, I know that his heart was always unswervingly my own. My dear, noble Evelyn! My pure, loving little darling! Ah! I have wearied heaven with prayers that God would give her back to my arms."

Unable to conceal the emotion he was unwilling she should witness, Dr. Grey disengaged his arm and walked away, striving to regain his usual composure.

Did the governess suspect the proximity of her long-lost friend? If she claimed his assistance in prosecuting her search, what course would duty dictate?

Retracing his steps, he found that she had seated herself on a bench near one of the tallest lilacs, and having thrown aside her quilted hood of scarlet silk, her care-worn countenance was fully exposed.

She was gazing very intently at some object in her hand, which she bent over and kissed several times, and did not perceive his approach until he stood beside her.

"Dr. Grey, I believe my prayer has been heard, and that at last I have discovered a clew to the retreat of my lost Evelyn. Last week I went to a jewelry store in town, to buy a locket which I intended as a birthday gift for Muriel. Several customers had preceded me, and while waiting, my attention was attracted towards one of the workmen who uttered an impatient ejaculation and dashed down some article upon which he was at work. As it fell, I saw that it was an oval ivory miniature, originally surrounded with very large handsome pearls, the

Digitized by Google

greater portion of which the jeweller had removed and placed in a small glass bowl that stood near him. I leaned down to examine the miniature, and though the paint was blurred and faded, it was impossible to mistake the likeness, and you cannot realize the thrill that ran along my nerves as I recognized the portrait of Evelyn. So great was my astonishment and delight that I must have cried out, for the people in the store all turned and stared at me, and when I snatched the piece of ivory from the work-table, the man looked at me in amazement. Very incoherently I demanded where and how he obtained it, and, beckoning to the proprietor, he said, 'Just as I told you; this has turned out stolen property.' Then he opened a drawer and took from it a similar oval slab of ivory, and when I looked at it and saw Maurice's handsome face, my brain reeled, and I grew so dizzy I almost fell. 'Madam, do you know these portraits?' asked the proprietor.

"I told him that I did, — that I had seen these jewelled miniatures eight years before on the dressing-table of a bride, and I implored him to tell me how they came into his possession. He fitted them into a dingy, worn case, which seemed to have been composed of purple velvet, and informed me that he purchased the whole from an Irish lad, who asserted that he picked it up on the beach, where it had evidently drifted in a high tide. On examination, he found that the case had indeed been saturated with sea-water, but the pearls were in such a remarkable state of preservation that he doubted the lad's statement. He had bought the miniatures in order to secure the pearls, which he assured me were unusually fine, and to satisfy himself concerning the affair had advertised two ivory miniatures, and invited the owners to come forward and prove property. After the expiration of a week, he discontinued the notice, and finally ordered the pearls removed from their gold frames. When I had given him the names of the originals, he consented that I should take the portraits which were now worthless to him, and gave me also the name of the boy. It was not until two days afterward that I succeeded in finding Thomas Donovan, a lad about fourteen years old, whose mother Phœbe is a laundress,

Digitized by Google

and does up laces and fine muslins. When I called and stated the object of my visit he seemed much confused, but sullenly repeated the assertion made to the jeweller. Yesterday I went again and had a long conversation with his mother, who must be an honest soul, for she assured me she knew nothing of the matter, and would investigate it immediately. The boy was absent, but she promised either to send him here this morning or come in person, to acquaint me with the result. I offered a reward if he would confess where he obtained them; and if he proved obstinate, threatened to have him arrested. Now, Dr. Grey, you can understand why I have so tediously made a full revelation of my past, for I wish to enlist your sympathy and claim your aid in my search for my long-lost friend. These portraits inadequately represent the fascinating beauty of one of the originals, and the sweetness and almost angelic purity of the other."

She held up the somewhat defaced and faded miniatures for the inspection of her companion, but scarcely glancing at them, he said, abstractedly, —

"You are sure they belonged to Mrs. Carlyle?"

"Yes. As she put on her diamonds just before going down stairs she showed me the portraits in her jewelry casket, where she had also placed a similar one of myself. Ah! at this instant I seem to see her beaming face, as she bent down, and sweeping her veil aside, kissed my picture and Maurice's."

"Do you imagine that she is in America?"

"No; I fear she is dead, and that these were stolen from the old nurse. Who is that yonder? Ah, yes, — Phœbe Donovan. Now I shall hear the truth."

Forgetting her shawl, and unmindful of the fact that the sun was streaming full on her head and face, she hurried to meet the woman who was ascending the avenue, and very soon they entered the house.

A quarter of an hour elapsed ere Phœbe came out, and walked rapidly away; and, unwilling to prolong his suspense, Dr. Grey went in search of the governess.

He met her in the hall, and saw that she was equipped for a

Digitized by Google

walk. Her cheeks were scarlet, her brown eyes all aglow with eager expectation, and her lips twitched, as she exclaimed,—

"Oh, doctor, I hope everything; for I learn that the pictures were found on the lawn at 'Solitude,' where Phœbe was once hired as cook; and she recognized the case as the same she had one day seen on a writing-desk in the parlor. The boy confessed that he picked it up from the grass, and, after taking out the contents, soaked the case in a bucket of salt-water. Phœbe says the pictures belong to Mrs. Gerôme, the gray-headed woman who owns that place on the beach, and I am almost tempted to believe she is Elsie, who may have married again. At all events, I shall soon know where she obtained the portraits."

"You are not going to 'Solitude'?"

"Yes, immediately. I can not rest till I have learned all. God grant I may not be mocked in my hopes."

The unwonted excitement had kindled a strange beauty in the whilom passive face, and Dr. Grey could for the first time realize how lovely she must have been in the happy days of eld.

"Miss Dexter, Mrs. Gerome will not receive you. She sees no visitors, not even ministers of the gospel."

"She must — she shall — admit me; for I will assure her that life and death hang upon it."

"How so?"

"If Evelyn is alive, and I can discover her retreat, I will urge her to go to her husband, who needs her care. You know Mrs. Gerome, — she is one of your patients. Come with me, and prevail upon her to receive me."

In her eagerness she laid her hand on his arm, and even then noticed and wondered at the crimson that suddenly leaped into his olive face.

"Some day I will give you good reasons for refusing your equest, which it is impossible for me to grant. If you are resolved to hazard the visit, I will take you in my buggy as far as the gate at 'Solitude,' and when you return will confer with you concerning the result. Just now, I can promise no more."

Digitized by Google

An expression of disappointment clouded her brow.

"I had hoped that you would sympathize with and be more interested in my great sorrow."

"Miss Dexter, my interest is more profound, more intense, than you can imagine, but at this juncture circumstances forbid its expression. My buggy is at the door."

CHAPTER XXX.

EVEN at mid-day the grounds around "Solitude" were sombre and chill, for across the sky the winds had woven a thin, vapory veil, whose cloud-meshes seemed fine as lace-work; and through this gilded netting the sun looked hazy, the light wan and yellow, and rifled of its customary noon glitter.

Following one of the serpentine walks, the governess was approaching the house, when her attention was attracted by the gleaming surface of a tomb, and she turned towards the pyramidal deodars that were swaying slowly in the breeze,—

> "Warming their heads in the sun,
> Checkering the grass with their shade,"

and photographing fringy images on the shining marble.

A broad circle of violets, blue with bloom, surrounded a sexangular temple, whose dome was terminated by a mural crown and surmounted by a cross. The beautifully polished pillars were fluted, and wreathed with carved ivy that wound up to the richly-sculptured cornices, where poppies clustered and tossed their leaves along the architrave; and, in the centre, visible through all the arches, rose an altar, bearing two angels with fingers on their lips, who guarded an exquisite urn that was inscribed "*cor cordium.*"

Beneath the eastern arch, that directly fronted the sea, were

Digitized by Google

two steps leading into the mausoleum, and, as Miss Dexter stood within, she saw that the floor was arranged with slabs for only two tombs close to the altar, one side of which bore in golden tracery,—

"*Elsie Maclean*, 68. *Amicus Amicorum.*"

Around the base of the urn were scattered some fresh geranium-leaves, and very near it stood a tall, slender, Venetian glass vase filled with odorous flowers, which had evidently been gathered and arranged that day.

For whom had the remaining slab and opposite side of the altar been reserved?

The heart of the governess seemed for a moment to forget its functions, then a vague hope made it throb fiercely; and rapidly the anxious woman directed her steps towards the house, that seemed as silent as the grave behind her.

The hall door had swung partially open, and, dreading that she might be refused admittance if she rang the bell, she availed herself of the lucky accident (which in Elsie's lifetime never happened), and entered unchallenged and unobserved.

From the parlor issued a rather monotonous and suppressed sound, as of some one reading aloud, and, advancing a few steps, the governess stood inside the threshold.

The curtains of the south window were looped back, the blinds thrown open, and the sickly sunshine poured in, lighting the easel, before which the mistress of the house had drawn an ottoman and seated herself.

To-day, an air of unwonted negligence marked her appearance, usually distinguished by extraordinary care and taste.

Her white merino *robe de chambre* was partially ungirded, and the blue tassels trailed on the carpet; her luxuriant hair instead of being braided and classically coiled, was gathered in three or four large heavy loops, and fastened rather loosely by the massive silver comb that allowed one long tress to straggle across her shoulder, while the folds in front slipped low on her temples and forehead.

Digitized by Google

Intently contemplating her work, she leaned her cheek on her hand, and only the profile was visible from the door, as she repeated, in a subdued tone, —

"I stanch with ice my burning breast,
With silence balm my whirling brain,
O Brandan! to this hour of rest,
That Joppan leper's ease was pain."

The easel held the largest of many pictures, upon which she had lavished time and study, and her present work was a wide stretch of mid-ocean, lighted by innumerable stars, and a round glittering polar moon that swung mid-heaven like a globe of silver, and shed a ghostly lustre on the raging, ragged waves, above which an Aurora Borealis lifted its gleaming arch of mysterious white fires.

On the flowery shore of a tropic isle, under clustering boughs of lime and citron, knelt the venerable figure of Saint Brandan, — and upon a towering, jagged iceberg, whose crystal cliffs and diamond peaks glittered with the ghastly radiance reflected from arctic moon and boreal flames, lay Judas, pressing his hot palms and burning breast to the frigid bosom of his sailing sapphire berg.

No hideous, scowling, red-haired arch-apostate was this painted Iscariot, — but a handsome man, whose features were startlingly like those in the ivory miniature.

It was a wild, dreary, mournful picture, suggestive of melancholy mediæval myths, and most abnormal phantasms; and would more appropriately have draped the walls of some flagellating ascetic's cell, than the luxuriously furnished room that now contained it.

Bending forward to deepen the dark circles which suffering and remorse had worn beneath the brilliant eyes of the apostle, the lonely artist added another verse to her quotation, —

"Once every year, when carols wake
On earth the Christmas night's repose,
Arising from the sinner's lake
I journey to these healing snows."

Digitized by Google

The motion loosened a delicate white lily pinned at her throat, and it fell upon the palette, sullying its purity with the dark paint to which its petals clung. She removed it, looked at its defaced loveliness, and tossed it aside, saying moodily,—

"Typical of our souls, originally dowered with a stainless and well-nigh perfect holiness, but drooping dust-ward continually, and once tainted by the fall,—hugging the corruption that ruined it."

As the governess looked and listened, a half-perplexed, half-frightened expression passed over her countenance, and at length she advanced to the arch, and said, tremblingly,—

"Can I have a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Gerome, on important business?"

"My God! am I verily mad at last? Because I called up Judas, must I also evoke the partner of his crime?"

With a thrilling, almost blood-curdling cry Mrs. Gerome had leaped to her feet at the sound of Miss Dexter's voice, and, dropping palette and brush, confronted her with a look of horror and hate. The quick and violent movement shook out her comb, and down came the folds of hair, falling like a silver cataract to her knees.

Bewildered by memories which the face and form recalled, the governess looked at the shining white locks, and her lips blanched, as she stammered,—

"Are you Mrs. Gerome?"

Her scarlet hood had fallen back, disclosing her wealth of golden hair; and, gazing at her thin but still lovely features, rouged by a hectic glow that lent strange beauty to the wide, brown eyes, Mrs. Gerome answered, huskily,—

"I am the mistress of this house. Who is the woman who has the audacity to intrude upon my seclusion, and vividly remind me of one whose hated lineaments have cursed my memory for years? Woman, if I believed *she* had the effrontery to thrust herself into my presence, I should fear that at this instant I am afflicted with the abhorred sight of Edith Dexter, than whom a legion of devils would be more welcome!"

The name fell hissingly from her stern mouth, and when she

Digitized by Google

shook back the hair that drooped over her brow, the gray globe-like eyes glittered as polished blue steel under some fitful light.

A low, half-stifled cry escaped the governess, and springing forward she fell on her knees and grasped the white hands that had clutched each other.

"Evelyn! It must be Evelyn! despite this gray hair and wan, changed face! and I could never mistake these beautiful, beautiful hands — unlike any others in the world! Evelyn, my lost darling! oh, I thank God I have found you before I die!"

She covered the cold fingers with kisses, and pressed her face to a band of the floating hair; but with a gesture of loathing Mrs. Gerome broke away, and retreated a few steps.

"How dare you come into my presence? Goaded by a desire to witness the ruin you helped to accomplish? Your audacity at least astounds me; but fate decrees you the enjoyment of its reward. Lo! here I am! Behold the gray shadow of what was once a happy, confiding girl! Behold in the desolate, lonely woman, who hides her disgrace under the name of Agla Gerome, that bride of an hour, that Evelyn whose heart you stabbed! Does the wreck entirely satisfy you? What more could even fiendish malevolence desire?"

"Evelyn, you wrong me. For mercy's sake do not upbraid and taunt me so unjustly!"

In vain she held out her hands imploringly, while tears rolled over her crimsoned cheeks, and sobs impeded her utterance. Mrs. Gerome laughed bitterly.

"What! I wrong you? Have *you* gone mad, instead of your victim? Miss Dexter, you and I can scarcely afford to deal in mock tragedy, and though you make a pretty picture kneeling there, I have no mind to paint you yonder, where I put your colleague, Judas. Is it not a good likeness of your lover, as he looked that memorable day when the broad banana-leaves overshadowed his handsome head?"

She rapped the canvas with her clenched hand, and continued, in accents of indescribable scorn, —

Digitized by Google

"Do you kneel as penitent or petitioner? You come to crave my pardon, or my husband?"

The governess had bowed her face almost to the carpet, like some fragile flower borne down by a sudden flood; but now she rose, and, throwing her head back proudly, answered with firm yet gentle dignity,—

"Of Mrs. Gerome I crave nothing. Of Evelyn Carlyle I demand justice; simply bare justice."

"Justice! You are rash, Miss Dexter, to challenge fate; for, were justice meted out, the burden would prove more intolerable to you than that King Stork whom Zeus sent down as a Nemesis to quiet clamorous frogs. Justice, let me tell you, long ago fled from this hostile and inhospitable earth and took refuge beyond the stars, where, please God, you and I shall one day confront her and get our long-defrauded dues. Justice? Nay, nay! the thing I recognize as justice would crush you utterly, and you should flee to the *Ultima Thule* to avoid it. I divine your mission. You come as envoy-extraordinary from my honorable and chivalric husband, to demand release from the bonds that doom me to wear his name and you to live without that spotless ægis? Since my fortune no longer percolates through the sieve of his pocket, and legal quibbles can not now avail to wring thousands from my purse, he desires a divorce, in order to remove to your fair wrists the fetters which have proved more galling to mine than those of iron."

"Evelyn, insult must not be heaped upon injury. As God hears me, I tell you solemnly that you have seen your husband since I have. Upon Maurice Carlyle's face I have never looked since that fatal hour when I last saw yours, ghastly and rigid, against the background of guava-boughs. From that day until this, I have neither seen, nor spoken, nor written to him."

"Then why are you here, to torment me with the sight of your face, which would darken the precincts of heaven, if I met it inside of the gates of pearl?"

"I have come to exonerate myself from the aspersions that in your frenzy you have cast upon me. Evelyn, I am here to prove that my wrongs are greater than yours,— and if either

Digitized by Google

should crave pardon, it would best become you to sue for it at my hands. But for you, I should have been a happy wife,—blessed with a devoted husband and fond mother; and now in my loneliness I stand for vindication before her who robbed me of every earthly hope, and blotted all light, all verdure, all beauty from my life. You had known Maurice Carlyle six weeks, when you gave him your hand. I had grown up at his side,—had loved, trusted, prayed, and labored for him,—had been his promised wife for seven dreary years of toil and separation, and was counting the hours until the moment when he would lead me to the altar. Ah, Evelyn,—"

A violent spell of coughing interrupted the governess, and when it ended she did not complete the sentence.

Impatiently Mrs. Gerome motioned to her to continue, and, turning her head which had been averted, the hostess saw that her guest was endeavoring to stanch a stream of blood that trickled across her lips. Involuntarily the former started forward and drew an easy-chair close to the slender figure which leaned for support against the corner of the piano.

"Are you ill? Pray sit down."

"It is only a hemorrhage from my lungs, which I have long had reason to expect."

Wearily she sank into the chair, and hastily pouring a glass of water from a gilt-starred crystal *carafe*, standing on the centre-table, Mrs. Gerome silently offered it. As the governess drained and returned the goblet, a drop of blood that stained the rim fell on the hand of the mistress of the house.

Miss Dexter attempted to remove it with the end of her plaid shawl, but her companion drew back, and taking a dainty, perfumed handkerchief from her pocket, shook out its folds and said, hastily,—

"It is of no consequence. I see your handkerchief is already saturated; will you accept mine?"

Without waiting for a reply, she laid it on the lap of the visitor, and left the room.

Soon after, a servant brought in a basin of water and towels, which she placed on the table, and then, without question or comment, withdrew.

Digitized by Google

Some time elapsed before Mrs. Gerome re-entered the parlor, bearing a glass of wine in her hand. Miss Dexter had bathed her face, and, looking up, she saw that the gray hair had been carefully coiled and fastened, and the flowing merino belted at the waist; but the brow wore its heavy cloud, and the arch of the lip had not unbent.

"I hope you are better. Permit me to insist upon your taking this wine."

She proffered it, but the governess shook her head, and tears ran down her cheeks, as she said,—

"Thank you,—but I do not require it; indeed I could not swallow it."

The hostess bowed, and, placing the glass within her reach, walked to the window which looked out on the marble mausoleum, and stood leaning against the cedarn facing.

Five, ten minutes passed, and the silence was only broken by the ticking of the bronze clock on the mantelpiece.

"Evelyn."

The voice was so sweet, so thrilling, so mournfully pleading, that it might have wooed even stone to pity; but Mrs. Gerome merely glanced over her shoulder, and said, frigidly,—

"Can I in any way contribute to Miss Dexter's comfort? The servants tell me there is no conveyance waiting for you; but, since you seem too feeble to walk away, my carriage is at your service whenever you wish to return. Shall I order it?"

"No, I will not trouble you. I can walk; and, after a little while, I will go away forever. Evelyn, do you think me utterly unprincipled?"

A moment passed before she was answered.

"While you are in my house, courtesy forbids the expression of my opinion of your character."

"Oh, Evelyn, my darling! God knows I have not merited this harshness, this cruelty from your dear hands. Eight tedious, miserable years I have searched and prayed for you,—have clung to the hope of finding you, of telling you all,—of hearing your precious lips utter those words for which my ears have so long ached, 'Edith, I hold you guiltless of my wretchedness.'

Digitized by Google

But at last, when my search is successful, to be browbeaten, derided, denounced, insulted, — oh, this is bitter indeed! This is too hard to be borne!"

Her anguish was uncontrollable, and she sobbed aloud.

Across Mrs. Gerome's white lips crept a quiver, and over her frozen features rose an unwonted flush; but she did not move a muscle, or suffer her eyes to wander from the cross and crown on Elsie's tomb.

"Evelyn, I believe, I hope (and may God forgive me if I sin in hoping), that I have not many years, or perhaps even months to live; and it would comfort me in my dying hour to feel that I had laid before you some facts, of which I know you must be ignorant. You have harshly and unjustly prejudged me, — have steeled yourself against me; still I wish to tell you some things that weigh heavily upon my aching, desolate heart. Will you allow me to do so now? Will you hear me?"

There was evidently a struggle in the mind of the motionless woman beside the window, but it was brief, and left no trace in the cold, ringing voice.

"I will hear you."

Slowly and impressively the governess began the narrative, of which she had given Dr. Grey a hasty *résumé*, and when she mentioned the midnight labors in which she had engaged, the copying of legal documents, the sale of her drawings, the hoarding of her salary in order to aid her mother and her betrothed, and to remove the obstacles to her marriage, Mrs. Gerome sat down, and, crossing her arms on the window-sill, hid her face upon them.

Unflinchingly Miss Dexter detailed all that occurred after her arrival in New York; and finally, approaching the window, she insisted that her listener should peruse the last letter received from her lover, and containing the promise that within ten days he would come to claim his bride. But the lovely hand waved it aside, and the proud voice exclaimed impatiently, —

"I need no additional proof of his perfidy, which, beyond controversy, was long ago established. Go on! go on!"

Digitized by Google

Upon all that followed the ceremony, — the departure of the wife, — and her own despairing grief, the governess dwelt with touching eloquence and pathos; and, at last, as she spoke of her fruitless journey to England, — her sad search through the insane asylums, — Mrs. Gerome lifted her queenly head, and bent a piercing glance upon the speaker.

Ah! what a hungry, eager expression looked out shyly from her whilom hopeless eyes, when, with an imperious gesture, she silenced her visitor, and asked, —

"You spent your hard earnings, not in *trousseau*, or preparations for housekeeping; but hunting for me in lunatic asylums? Suppose you had found me in a mad-house?"

"Then I should have become an inmate of the same gloomy walls; and, while you lived, should have shared with faithful Elsie the care and charge of you. God is my witness, I had resolved to dedicate my remaining years to the task of cheering and guarding yours. Oh, Evelyn! not until we stand in the great Court of Heaven can you realize how sincerely, how tenderly, and unwaveringly, I love you. My darling, how can you distrust my faithful heart?"

She sank on her knees, and, throwing her arms around the tall, slender form, looked with mournful, beseeching tenderness at the haughty features above her.

For a moment the proud, pale face glowed, — the great shadowy eyes kindled and shone like wintry planets in some crystalline sky; but doubt, murderous, cynical doubt, grappled with hope, and strangled it.

"Edith, I wish I could believe you. I am struggling desperately to lay hold of the fluttering garments of faith, but I can not! Suspicion has walked hand in hand with me so long that I can not shake off her numbing touch, and I distrust all human things, save the dusty heart that moulders yonder in my old Elsie's grave."

She pointed to the white columns of the temple, and then the uplifted fingers fell heavily on Edith's shoulder.

"Go on. I wish to learn whose treachery betrayed the secret of my retreat."

Digitized by Google

Pressing her feverish lips to the hand she admired so enthusiastically, Miss Dexter resumed her recital of what had occurred since her journey to London, and finally ended it with an account of her removal to 'Grassmere,' and of the discovery of the miniatures that guided her to 'Solitude.'

A long pause followed, and a heavy sigh, only partially smothered, indexed the contest that raged under Mrs. Gerome's calm exterior.

"Edith, would you have inferred from Dr. Grey's manner that he was not only acquainted with my history, but yours; at least, so far as it intersected mine? Did he furnish no hint, no clew, that aided you in your search?"

"None whatever. On the contrary, he appeared so preoccupied, so abstracted, that I reproached him with indifference to my troubles. It is not possible that he knew all, while I briefly summed up a portion of the past."

"At that moment he was thoroughly cognizant of everything that I could tell him. But, at least, one honorable, trustworthy man yet graces the race; one pure, incorruptible, and consistent Christian remains to shed lustre upon a church that can nowhere boast his peer. I confided all to Dr. Grey, and he has kept the trust. Ah, Edith, if you had only reposed the same confidence in me, during those halcyon days of our early friendship, — days that seem to me now as far off, as dim and unreal, as those starry nights when I lay in my little crib, dreaming of that mother whose face I never saw, whose smile is one of the surprises and blessings reserved for eternity, — how different my lot and yours might have been! Why did you not trust me with your happy hopes, your lover's name and difficulties? How differently I would have invested that fortune, which proved our common ruin, and doomed three lives to uselessness and woe. To-day you might have proudly worn the name that I utterly detest; and I, the outcast, the wanderer, the tireless, friendless waif, drifting despairingly down the tide of time, — even I, the unloved, might have been, not a solitary cumberer, not a household upas, — but why taunt

Digitized by Google

the hideous Actual with a blessed and beautiful Impossible? Ah, truly, truly, —

> 'What might have been, I know, is not:
> What must be, must be borne;
> But ah! what hath been will not be forgot,
> Never, oh! never, in the years to follow!'"

She closed her eyes and seemed pondering the past, and mutely the governess prayed that hallowed memories of their former affection might soften her apparently petrified heart.

Edith saw a great change overspread the countenance, but could not accurately interpret its import; and her own heart began to beat the long-roll.

The heavy black eyelashes lying on Mrs. Gerome's marble cheeks glistened, trembled, and tears stole slowly across her face. She raised her hand, but dropped it in her lap, and frowned slightly and sighed. Then she lifted it once more, and looking through the shining mist that magnified her splendid eyes, she laid her fingers on the golden head of the kneeling woman.

"You and I have innocently wronged and ruined each other; you with your beauty, I with my accursed gold. Time was when at your bidding I would have laid my throbbing heart at your feet, provided I could thereby save you one pang; for I loved you as women very rarely love one another. But now, lonely and hopeless, I have lost the power, the capacity to love anything, and I have no heart left in my bosom. I acquit you of much for which I formerly held you responsible, and I honor the purity of purpose that forbade your receiving the visits or letters of him who must one day answer for our worthless lives. I fully forgive you the suffering that made me prematurely old; but my affection is as dead as all my girlish hopes, and buried under the crushing years that have dragged themselves over my poor, proud, pain-bleached head. You are more fortunate, more enviable than I, for you have the comforting anticipation of a speedy release, the precious assurance that your torture will ere long be ended; while I must

Digitized by Google

front the prospect of perhaps fourscore and ten years; for, despite my ivory skin and fever-blanched locks, I am maddeningly healthy. Friend of my childhood, friend of my happy, sunny, sinless days, I cordially congratulate you on your approaching deliverance. God knows I would pay you my fortune, if I could innocently and successfully inject into my veins and lungs the poison that will soon rob you of care and regret. If I was harsh to-day, forgive and forget it, for nothing rankles in the grave; and now, Edith, go away quickly, before I repent and recant the words I here utter. God comfort you, Edith Dexter, and remember that I hold you guiltless of my wrecked destiny."

"Oh, Evelyn! add one thing more. Say, 'Edith, I love you.'"

A strangely mournful smile parted Mrs. Gerome's perfect lips over her dazzling teeth, as she pushed the kneeling figure from her, and said coldly,—

"Rise, and leave me. I love no living thing, brute or human, for even my faithful dog lies buried a few yards hence. Maurice treated my warm, loving nature, as Tofana did her unsuspecting victims, and for that slow poison there is no antidote. The sole interest I have in life centres in my art, and when death mercifully remembers me, some pictures I have patiently wrought out will be given to the public; and the next generation will, perhaps,—

'Hear the world applaud the hollow ghost,
Which blamed the living woman,'

and, smiling grimly in my coffin, I shall echo,—

'Hither to come, and to sleep,
Under the wings of renown.'"

Both rose, and the two so long divided faced each other sorrowfully.

"Dear Evelyn, do not hug despair so stubbornly to your bosom. You might brighten your solitary existence if you

Digitized by Google

would, and be comparatively happy in this lovely seaside home."

"You think 'Solitude' a very desirable and beautiful retreat? Do you remember the gay raiment and glittering jewels that covered the radiant bride of Giacopone di Todi? One day an accident at a public festival mangled her mortally, and when her gorgeous garments were torn off, lo!

'A robe of sackcloth next the smooth, white skin.'"

A sudden pallor crept over the delicate face of the governess, and, folding her hands, she exclaimed with passionate vehemence,—

"I can not, I must not shrink from the chief object of my visit here. I came not only to exonerate myself, but to plead for poor Maurice."

Mrs. Gerome started back, and the pitiless gleam came instantly into her softened eyes.

"Do not mention his name again. I thought you had neither seen nor heard from him."

"I must plead his wretched cause, since he is denied the privilege of appealing to your mercy. Evelyn, my friends write me that he is almost in a state of destitution. Only last night I received this letter, which I leave for your perusal, and which assures me he is in want, and, moreover, is dangerously ill. Who has the right, the privilege,—whose is the duty, imperative and stern, to hasten to his bedside, to alleviate his suffering, to provide for his needs? Yours, Evelyn Carlyle, and yours alone. Where are the marriage vows that you snatched from my lips eight years ago, and eagerly took upon your own? Did you not solemnly swear in the presence of heaven and earth to serve him and keep him in sickness, and, forsaking all others, to hold him from that day forward for better, for worse, until death did part ye? Oh, Evelyn! do not scowl, and turn away. However unworthy, he is your husband in the sight of God and man, and your wedding oath calls you to him in this hour of his terrible need. Can you sleep peacefully, knowing that he is tossing with paroxysms

Digitized by Google

of pain, and perhaps hungering and thirsting for that which you could readily supply? If it were right,—if I dared, I would hasten to him; but my conscience inexorably forbids the thought, and consigns my heart to torture, for which there is no name. You will tell me that you provided once, twice, for all reasonable wants,—that he has recklessly squandered liberal allowances. But will that satisfy your conscience, while you still possess ample means to aid him? Will you permit the man whose name you bear to live on other charity than your own,—and finally, to fill a pauper's grave? Oh, Evelyn! was it for this that you took my darling, my idol, from my clinging, loving arms? Will you see his body writhing in the agony of disease, and his precious, immortal soul in fearful jeopardy, while you stand afar off, surrounded by every luxury that ingenuity can suggest, and gold purchase? Oh, Evelyn! be merciful; do your duty. Like a brave, true, though injured woman, go to Maurice, and strive to make him comfortable; to lighten, by your pardon, his sad, heavily laden heart. By your past, your memories of your betrothal, your hopes of heaven, and above all, by your marriage vows, I implore you to discharge your sacred duties."

A bitter smile twisted the muscles about Mrs. Gerome's mouth, as she gazed into the quivering, eloquent face of her companion, and listened to the impetuous appeal that poured so pathetically over her burning lips.

"Edith, you amaze me. Is it possible that after all your injuries you can cling so fondly, so madly, to the man who slighted, and humiliated, and blighted you?"

"Ah! you are his wife, and I am the ridiculed and pitied victim of his flirtation, so says the world; but my affection outlives yours. Evelyn, I have loved him from the time when I can first recollect; I loved him with a deathless devotion that neither his unworthiness, nor time, nor eternity can conquer; and to-day, I tell you that he is dear to me,—dear to me as some precious corpse, over which a gravestone has gathered moss for eight weary, dreary years. The angels in heaven would not blush for the feeling in my heart towards

Digitized by Google

Maurice Carlyle; and the God who must soon judge me will not condemn the pure and sacred love I cherish for the only man who could ever have been my husband, but whom I have resolutely refused to see, even when the world believed you dead. I can not go to him, and comfort, and provide for him now; but, in the name of God, and your oath, and if not for your own sake, at least for his and for mine, I ask you once more, Evelyn Carlyle, will you hasten to your erring but unhappy husband?"

Her scarlet cheeks and lips, her glowing brown eyes, and waving yellow hair, formed a singular contrast to the colorless, cold face of her listener; whose steely gaze was fixed on the distant sea, that lay like a beryl mirror beneath the hazy sky.

When the sound of the sweet but strained voice had died away, Mrs. Gerome turned her eyes towards the governess, and answered,—

"I will do my duty, no matter how revolting."

"Thank God! When will you go?"

"If at all, at once."

"Evelyn, when you come home, will you not let me see you, now and then, and win my way back to my old place in your dear heart? Oh! my pale, peerless darling, do not deny me this."

"Home? I have no home. My heart is grayer than my head,—and your old niche is full of dust, and skeletons, and murdered hopes. Let me see you no more in this world; and perhaps in the Everlasting Rest I shall forget my hideous past, which your face recalls."

"Oh, my poor bruised darling! do not banish me," wailed the governess, endeavoring to fold her arms about the queenly form, which silently but effectually held her back.

"At least, dear Evelyn, let me kiss you once more, in token that you cherish no bitterness against me."

"Good-by, Edith. I hold you innocent of my injuries. May God help you, and call us both speedily to our dreamless sleep under moss and marble."

She bent down, and with firm, icy lips, lightly touched the

Digitized by Google

forehead of the governess, and walked away, unheeding the burst of tears with which the frigid caress was welcomed.

"And I think, in the lives of most women and men,
There's a moment when all would go smooth and even,
If only the dead could find out when
To come back, and be forgiven."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"MADAM, are you aware that you breathe an infected atmosphere? — that this building is assigned to small-pox cases? Pray do not cross the threshold."

The superintendent of the hospital laid aside his pipe, and advanced to meet the stranger whose knock had startled him from a *post-prandial* doze.

"I am not afraid of contagion, and came to see the patient who was brought here yesterday from No. 139 Elm Street."

"Have you a permit to visit here?"

"Yes; you will find it on this paper, given me by the proper authorities."

"What is the name of the person you desire to see?"

The superintendent opened a book that lay on the table beside him, and drew his finger up and down the page.

"Maurice Carlyle."

"Ah, yes, — I have it now. Maurice Carlyle, Ward 3, — cot No. 7. Madam, may I ask, — "

"No, sir; I have no inclination to answer idle questions. Will you show me the way, or shall I find it?"

"Certainly, I will conduct you; but I was about to remark that a death has just occurred in Ward No. 3, and I am under the impression that it was the Elm Street case. Madam, you look faint; shall I bring you a glass of water?"

"No. Show me the body of the dead."

Digitized by Google

"This way, if you please."

He walked down a dim, low-vaulted passage, and paused at the entrance of a room lined with cots, where the nurse was slowly passing from patient to patient.

"Nurse, show this lady to cot No. 7."

Swiftly the tall figure of the visitor glided down the room, and placing her hand on the arm of the nurse, she said huskily,—

"Where is the man who has just died? Quick! do not keep me in suspense."

"There, to the right; shall I uncover the face?"

Under the blue check coverlet that was spread smoothly over the cot, the stiff outlines of a human form were clearly defined; and, when the nurse stooped, the stranger put out one arm and held him back, while her whole frame trembled violently.

"Stop! be good enough to leave me."

The attendant withdrew a few yards, and curiously watched the queenly woman, who stood motionless, with her fingers tightly interlaced.

She was dressed in a gray suit of some shining fabric, and a long gossamer veil of the same hue hung over her features. After a few seconds she swept back the veil, and, as she bent forward, a stray sunbeam dipped through the closed shutters, and flashed across a white, horror-stricken face, crowned with clustering braids of silver hair.

She shut her eyes an instant, grasped the coverlet, and drew it down; then caught her breath, and looked at the dead.

It was a young, boyish face, horribly swollen and distorted, and coarse red locks were matted around his brow and temples.

"Thank God, Maurice Carlyle still lives."

She involuntarily raised her hands towards heaven, and the expression of dread melted from her countenance.

Slowly and reverently she re-covered the corpse, and approached the nurse.

"I am searching for my husband. Which cot is No. 7?"

"That on your left,—next to the dead."

Mrs. Carlyle turned, and gazed at the bloated crimson mask

Digitized by Google

of disease that writhed on the narrow bed, and a long shudder crept over her, as she endeavored to discover in that loathsome hideous visage some familiar feature — some trace of the manly beauty that once rendered it so fascinating.

The swollen blood-shot eyes stared vacantly at the ceiling, and, while delirious muttering fell upon the ears of the visitor, she saw that his cheeks were somewhat lacerated, and his hands, partially confined, were tearing at the inflamed flesh.

She shivered with horror, and a groan broke from her pitying heart.

"What an awful retribution! My God, have mercy upon him! He is sufficiently punished."

Drawing her perfumed lace handkerchief from her pocket, she leaned over and wiped away the bloody foam that oozed across his lips, and lifting his hot head turned it sufficiently to expose the right ear, where a large mole was hidden by the thick hair.

"Maurice Carlyle! But what a fearful wreck?"

She covered her eyes with her hand, and moaned.

The nurse came nearer, and said hesitatingly, —

"Madam, surely he is not your husband? His clothes are almost in tatters, while yours are — ahem! —"

"Spare me all comments on the comparison. Can I obtain a comfortable, quiet room, in this building, and have him removed to it at once? You hesitate? I will compensate you liberally, will pay almost any price for an apartment where he can at least have silence and seclusion."

"We can accommodate you, but of course if the patient is carried from this ward to a private room, we shall be compelled to charge extra."

"Charge what you choose, only arrange the matter as promptly as possible. How soon can you make the change?"

"In twenty minutes, madam."

The nurse rang for an assistant, to whom the necessary instructions were given, and in the *interim* Mrs. Carlyle leaned against the cot, and brushed away the flies that buzzed about the pitiable victims.

Digitized by Google

Two men carried the sufferer up a flight of steps, and ere long he was transferred to a large comfortable bed in an airy well-furnished apartment.

The removal had not been completed more than an hour, when the surgeon made his evening round, and followed the patient to his new quarters.

He paused at sight of the elegantly dressed woman who sat beside the bed, and said, stammeringly, —

"I am informed that No. 7 is your husband, and that you have taken charge of his case, and intend to nurse him. Have you had small-pox?"

"No, sir."

"Madam, you run a fearful risk."

"I fully appreciate the hazard, and am prepared to incur it. Do you regard this case as hopeless?"

"Not altogether, though the probabilities are that it will terminate fatally."

"I have had too little experience to warrant my undertaking the management of the case, and, while I intend to remain here, I wish you to engage the services of some trustworthy nurse who understands the treatment of this disease. Can you recommend such a person?"

"Yes, madam; I can send you a man in whom I have entire confidence, and fortunately he is not at present employed. If you desire it, I will see him within the next hour, and give him all requisite instructions about the patient."

"Promptness in this matter will greatly oblige me, and I wish to spare no expense in contributing to the comfort and restoration of the sufferer. As I am utterly unknown to you, I prefer to place in your hands a sufficient amount to defray all incidental expenditures."

She laid a roll of bills upon the table, and as Dr. Clingman counted them, she added, —

"It is possible that I may be attacked by this disease, though I have been repeatedly vaccinated; and if I should die, please recollect that you will find in my purse a memorandum of the

Digitized by Google

disposition I wish made of my body,—also the address of my agent and banker in New-York City."

With mingled curiosity and admiration the physician looked at the pale, handsome woman, who spoke of death as coldly and unconcernedly as of to-morrow's sun, or next month's moon.

"Madam, allow me to ask if you have no friends in this city,—no relatives nearer than New York?"

"None, sir. It is my wish that our conversation should be confined to the symptoms and treatment of your patient."

Dr. Clingman bowed, and, after writing minute instructions upon a sheet of paper left on the mantelpiece, took his departure.

Securing the door on the inside, Mrs. Carlyle threw aside her bonnet and wrappings, and came back to the sufferer on the bed.

Eight years of reckless excess and dissipation had obliterated every vestige of manly beauty from features that disease now rendered loathsome, and the curling hair and long beard were unkempt and grizzled.

Leaning against the pillow, the lonely woman bent over to scrutinize the distorted, burning face, and softly took into her cool palms one hot and swollen hand, which in other days she had admiringly stroked, and tenderly pressed against her cheek and lips. How totally unlike that countenance, which, handsome as Apollyon, had looked down at her on her bridal day, and fondly whispered—"my wife."

Memory mercilessly broke open sealed chambers in that wretched woman's heart, and out of one leaped a wail that made her tremble and moan,—"Oh, Evelyn, my wife, forgive your husband."

Slowly compassion began to bridge the dark gulf of separation and hate, and as the wife gazed at the writhing form of her husband, her stony face softened, and tears gathered in the large, mournful eyes.

"Ah, Maurice! This world has proved a huge cheat to you

Digitized by Google

and to me, — and well-nigh cost us all peace in the next one. My husband, yet my bitterest foe, — my first, my last, my only love! If I could recall one throb of the old affection, one atom of the old worshipping tenderness and devotion, — but it has withered; my heart is scorched and ashen, — and neither love nor hope haunts its desolate ruins. Poor, polluted, down-trodden idol! Maurice — Maurice — my husband, I have come. Evelyn, your wife, forgives you, as she hopes for pardon at the hands of her God."

Kneeling beside the bed, with her snowy fingers clasped around his, she bowed her head, and humbly prayed for his soul, and for her own; and, when the petition ended, that peace which this world can never give, — which had so long been exiled, fluttered back and brooded once more in her storm-riven heart.

Softly she lifted and smoothed the long tangled hair that clung to his forehead, and tears dripped upon his scarlet face, as she said; brokenly, —

"*Till death us do part!* Poor Maurice! Deserted and despised by your former parasites. After long years, my vows bring me back in the hour of your need. God grant you life, to redeem your past, — to save your sinful soul from eternal ruin."

Suns rose and set, weary days and solemn nights of vigil succeeded each other, and ceaselessly the wife and hired nurse watched the progress of the dreadful disease. Occasionally Mr. Carlyle talked deliriously, and more than once the name of Edith Dexter hung on his lips, and was coupled with tenderer terms than were ever bestowed on the woman who wore his own. Bending over his pillow, the pale watcher heard and noted all, and a sad pitying smile curved her mouth now and then, as she realized that the one holy love of this man's life triumphed over the wreck of fortune, health, and hope, and kept its hold upon the heart that long years before had sold itself to Lucifer.

Sleeplessly, faithfully, she went to and fro in that darkened room, whose atmosphere was tainted by infection, and

Digitized by Google

at last she found her reward. The crisis was safely passed, and she was assured the patient would recover.

The apartment was so dimly lighted that Mr. Carlyle took little notice of his attendants, but one afternoon when the nurse had gone to procure some refreshments, the sick man turned on his pillow, and looked earnestly at the woman who was engaged in writing at a table near the bed.

"Mrs. Smith."

Mrs. Carlyle rose and approached him.

"Are you Mrs. Smith,—my landlady?"

"No, sir. I am merely your nurse."

"My nurse? What is the matter with me?"

"Small-pox,—but the danger is now over."

"Small-pox! Where did I catch it? Am I still in Elm Street?"

"No, sir; you are in the hospital."

Shading his inflamed eyes with his hand, he mused for some moments, and she saw a perplexed and sorrowful expression cross his features.

"Is there any danger of my dying?"

"That danger is past."

"What is your name?"

"Mrs. Gerome."

"Stand a little closer to me. I find I am almost blind. Mrs. Gerome? Your voice is strangely like one that I have not heard for many years,—and it carries me back,—back—to—" He sighed, and pressed his fingers over his eyes.

After a few seconds, he said,—

"Do give me some water. I am as parched as Dives."

She lifted his head and put the glass to his lips,—and while he drank, his eyes searched her face, and lingered admiringly on her beautiful hand.

"Are you a regular nurse at this hospital?"

"I am engaged for your case."

"I see no pock-marks on your skin; it is as smooth as ivory Shall I escape as lightly?"

"It is impossible to tell. Here comes your dinner."

Digitized by Google

He caught her arm, and gazed earnestly at her.

"Is your hair really so white, or is it merely an illusion of my inflamed eyes?"

"There is not a dark hair in my head; it is as white as snow."

While the nurse prepared the food and arranged it on the table, Mrs. Carlyle hastily collected several articles scattered about the apartment, and softly opened the door.

Standing there a moment, she looked back at the figure comfortably elevated on pillows, and a long sigh of relief crossed her lips.

"Thank God! I have done my duty, and now he needs me no longer. Next time I see your face, Maurice Carlyle, I hope it will be at the last bar, in the final judgment; and then may the Lord have mercy upon us both."

The words were breathed inaudibly, and, closing the door gently, she hurried down the steps and in the direction of a small room which Dr. Clingman had converted into an office.

As she entered, he looked up and pushed back his spectacles.

"What can I do for you?"

"A little thing, which will cost you no trouble, but will greatly oblige me. Doctor, I have found you a kind and sympathizing gentleman, and am grateful for the delicate consideration with which you have treated me. Mr. Carlyle is beyond danger, and I shall leave him in your care. When he is sufficiently strong to be removed, I desire that you will give him this letter, which contains a check payable to his order. There, examine it, and be so good as to write me a receipt."

Silently he complied, and when she had re-enclosed the check and sealed the envelope she placed it in his hand.

"Dr. Clingman, is there any other place to which small-pox cases can be carried? To-day I have discovered some symptoms of the disease in my own system, and I feel assured I shall be ill before this time to-morrow."

"My dear madam, why not remain here?"

"Because I do not wish to be discovered by Mr. Carlyle, and

Digitized by Google

forced to meet him again. I prefer to suffer, and, if need be, die, alone and unknown."

"If you will trust yourself to me, and to a faithful female nurse whom I can secure, I promise you, upon my honor as a gentleman, that I will allow no one else to see you, living or dead. My dear madam, I beg you to reconsider, and remain where I can watch over, and perhaps preserve your life I dreaded this. You are feverish now."

Wearily she swept her hand across her forehead, and a dreary smile flitted over her wan features.

"My life is a worthless, melancholy thing, useless to others, and a crushing burden to me; and I might as well lay it down here as elsewhere. I accept your promise, Dr. Clingman, and hope you will obtain a room in the quiet and secluded portion of the building. If I should be so fortunate as to die, do not forget the memorandum in this purse. I leave my body in your care, my soul in the hands of Him who alone can give it rest."

"The burden of my days is hard to bear,
But God knows best;
And I have prayed, — but vain has been my prayer, —
For rest — for rest."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"MISS DEXTER, have you succeeded in seeing Mrs. Gerome since her return?"

"No, sir; she obstinately refuses to admit me, though I have called twice at the house. Yesterday I received a letter in answer to several that I have addressed to her, all of which she returned unopened. Since you have already learned so much of our melancholy history, why should I hesitate to acquaint you with the contents of her letter? You know the object of her journey north, and I will read you the result."

Digitized by Google

The governess drew a letter from her pocket, and Dr. Grey leaned his face on his hand and listened.

"SOLITUDE, *May 10th*, 18—.

"*Edith*,—No lingering vestige of affection, no remorseful tenderness, prompted that mission from which I have recently returned, and only the savage scourgings of implacable duty could have driven me, like a galley-slave, to my hated task. The victim of a horrible and disfiguring disease which so completely changed his countenance that his own mother would scarcely have recognized him,—and the tenant of a charity hospital in the town of ——, I found that man who has proved the Upas of your life and of mine. During his delirium I watched and nursed him—not lovingly (how could I?) but faithfully, kindly, pityingly. When all danger was safely passed, and his clouded intellect began to clear itself, I left him in careful hands, and provided an ample amount for his comfortable maintenance in coming years. I spared him the humiliation of recognizing in his nurse his injured and despised wife; and, as night after night I watched beside the pitiable wreck of a once handsome, fascinating, and idolized man, I fully and freely forgave Maurice Carlyle all the wrongs that so completely stranded my life. To-day he is well, and probably happy, while he finds himself possessed of means by which to gratify his extravagant tastes; but how long his naturally fine constitution can hold at bay the legion of ills that hunt like hungry wolves along the track of reckless dissipation, God only knows.

"For some natures it is exceedingly difficult to forgive,—to forget, impossible; and while my husband's abject wretchedness and degradation disarmed the hate that has for so many years rankled in my heart, I could never again look willingly upon his face. Edith, you and I have nothing in common but miserable memories, which, I beg you to believe, are sufficiently vivid, without the torturing adjunct of your countenance; therefore, pardon me if I decline to receive your visits, and return the letters that are quite as welcome and cheering to my

Digitized by Google

eyes as the little shoes and garments of the long-buried dead to the mother, who would fain look no more upon the harrowing relics. I do not wish to be harsh, but I must be honest, and our intercourse can never be renewed in this world.

"In bygone days, when I loved you so fondly and trusted you so fully, it was my intention to share my fortune with you; and, since I find that you have not forfeited my confidence in the purity of your purposes, such is still my wish. I enclose a draft on my banker, which I hope you will deem sufficient to enable you to abandon the arduous profession in which you have worn out your life. If I can feel assured that I have been instrumental in contributing to the peace and ease of the years that may yet be in store for you, it will serve as one honeyed drop to sweeten the dregs of the cup of woe I am draining. Edith, do not refuse the only aid I can offer you in your loneliness; and accept the earnest assurance that I shall be grateful for the privilege of promoting your comfort. Affection and trust I have not, and a few paltry thousands are all I am now able to bestow. By the love you once professed, and in the name of that compassion you should feel for me, I beg of you, despise not the gift; and let the consciousness that I have saved you from toil and fatigue quiet the soul and ease the heart of a lonely woman, who has shaken hands with every earthly hope. I have done my duty, my conscience is calm and contented, and I sit wearily on the stormy shore of time, waiting for the tide that will drift into eternity the desolate, proud soul of

"VASHTI CARLYLE."

Tears rolled over the governess' cheeks, and, refolding the letter, she said, sorrowfully, —

"My poor, heart-broken Vashti! She has resumed the name which old Elsie gave her because it was her mother's; and how mournfully appropriate it has proved. I could be happy if permitted to spend the residue of my days with her; but she decrees otherwise, and I have no alternative but submission to her imperious will."

Digitized by Google

Dr. Grey did not lift his face where the shadow of a great, voiceless grief hung heavily, and his low tone indexed deep and painful emotion, when he answered, —

"I sincerely deplore her unfortunate decision, for isolation only augments the ills from which she suffers. Many months have elapsed since I saw her last, but Robert Maclean told me to-day that she was sadly changed in appearance, and seemed in feeble health. She did not tell you that she had been dangerously ill with varioloid, contracted while nursing her husband. Although not in the least marked or disfigured, the attack must have seriously impaired her constitution, if all that Robert tells me be true. Since her return, one month ago, she has not left her room."

"Dr. Grey, exert your influence in my behalf, and prevail upon her to admit me."

"Miss Dexter, you ascribe to me powers of persuasion which, unfortunately, I do not possess; and Mrs. Carlyle's decree is beyond the reach of human agency. To the few who are earnestly interested in her welfare, there remains but one avenue of aid and comfort, — faithful, fervent prayer."

"Perhaps you are not aware of the exalted estimate she places on your character, nor of the value she attaches to your opinions. Of all living beings, she told me she reverenced and trusted you most; and you, at least, would not be denied access to her presence."

She could not see the tremor on his usually firm lips, nor the pallor that overspread his face, and when he spoke his grave voice did not betray the tumult in his aching heart.

"I am no longer a visitor at 'Solitude,' and shall not see its mistress unless she requires my professional aid. While I am very deeply interested in her happiness, I could never consent to intrude upon her seclusion."

"I know my days are numbered, and after a little while I shall sleep well under the ancient cedars that shade the headstones of my father and mother; but I could die more cheerfully, more joyfully, if Evelyn would only be comforted, and accept some human friendship."

Digitized by Google

"For some weeks you have seemed so much better that I hoped warm weather would quite relieve and invigorate you. Spend next winter in Cuba or Mexico, and it will probably add many months, possibly years, to your life."

She smiled, and shook her head.

"This beautiful springtime has temporarily baffled the disease, but for me there can be no restoration. Day by day I feel the ebbing of strength and energy, and the approach of my deliverer, death; but I realize also, what the Centaur uttered to Melampus, 'I decline unto my last days calm as the setting of the constellations; but I feel myself perishing and passing quickly away, like a snow-wreath floating on the stream.'"

As he looked at the thin, pure face where May sunshine streamed warm and bright, and marked the perfect peace that brooded over the changed features, Dr. Grey was reminded of the lines that might have been written for her, so fully were they suited to her case, —

> "I saw that one who lost her love in pain,
> Who trod on thorns, who drank the loathsome cup;
> The lost in night, in day was found again;
> The fallen was lifted up.
> They stood together in the blessed noon,
> They sang together through the length of days;
> Each loving face bent sunwards, like a moon
> New-lit with love and praise."

"My friend, the shadows are passing swiftly from your life, and, in the mild radiance of its close, you can well afford to forget the storms that clouded its dawn."

"Forget? No, Dr. Grey, I neither endeavor nor desire to forget the sorrows that first taught me the emptiness of earthly things, the futility of human schemes, — that snapped the frail reed of flesh to which I clung, and gave me, instead, the blessed support, the immovable arm of an everlasting God. Ah! that woman was deeply versed in the heart-lore of her own sex, who wrote, —

Digitized by Google

When I remember something which I had,
But which is gone, and I must do without,

. . . . . .

When I remember something promised me,
But which I never had, nor can have now,
Because the promiser we no more see
In countries that accord with mortal vow;
When I remember this, I mourn, — but yet
My happier days are not the days when I forget.'"

"If Mrs. Carlyle possessed a tithe of your faith and philosophy, how serene, how tranquilly useful her future years might prove."

"In God's own good time her trials will be sanctified to her eternal peace, and she will one day glide from grief to glory, for she can claim the promise of our Lord, 'The pure in heart shall see God.' No purer heart than Vashti Carlyle's throbs this side of the throne where seraphim and cherubim hover."

In the brief silence that succeeded, the governess observed the unusually grave and melancholy expression of her companion's countenance, and asked, timidly, —

"Has anything occurred recently to distress or annoy you? You look depressed."

"I feel inexpressibly anxious about Salome, concerning whose fate I can learn nothing that is comforting. In reply to my letter, urging him to make every effort to ascertain her locality and condition, Professor V—— writes, that he is now a confirmed invalid, confined to his room, and unable to conduct the search for his missing pupil. She left Palermo on a small vessel bound for Monaco, and her farewell note stated that all attempts to discover her retreat would prove futile, as she was resolved to preserve her incognito, and wished her friends in America to remain in ignorance of her mode of life. Professor V—— surmises that she is in Paris, but gives no good reason for the conjecture, except that she possibly sought the best medical advice for the treatment of her throat and recovery of her voice. His last letter, received yesterday, informed me that one of Salome's most devoted admirers, a Bostonian of immense

Digitized by Google

wealth, was so deeply grieved by her inexplicable disappearance that he was diligently searching for her in Leghorn and Monaco. She left Palermo alone, and with a comparatively empty purse."

"Dr. Grey, are you aware of the suspicions which Muriel has long entertained with reference to Mr. Granville's admiration of Salome, and the efforts of the latter to encourage his attentions?"

"I have very cogent reasons for believing that however amenable to censure Mr. Granville doubtless is, Muriel's distrust of Salome is totally unjust. If she were capable of the despicable course my ward is disposed to impute to her, I should cease to feel any interest in her career or fate; but I cherish the conviction that she would scorn to be guilty of conduct so ignoble. Her defects of character I shall neither deny nor attempt to palliate, but I trust her true womanly heart as I trust my own manly honor; and a stern sense of justice to the absent constrains me to vindicate her from Muriel's hasty and unfounded aspersions. So strong is my faith in Salome's conscientiousness, so earnest my friendship for her, that since the receipt of Professor V——'s letter I have determined to go immediately to Europe, and if possible discover her retreat. My sister's adopted child must not and shall not suffer and struggle among strangers, while I live to aid and protect her."

Miss Dexter rose and laid her thin, feverish hand on his arm, while embarrassment made her voice tremble slightly, —

"I am rejoiced to learn your decision, and God grant you speedy success in your quest. Do not deem me presumptuous or impertinent, if, prompted by a sincere desire to see you happy, I venture to say, that he who lightly values the pure, tender, devoted love of such a woman as Salome Owen, — tramples on treasures that would make his life affluent and blessed — that neither gold can purchase nor royalty compel. Under your guidance, moulded by your influence, she would become a noble woman, — of whom any man might justly be proud."

Fearful that she had already incurred his displeasure, and un-

Digitized by Google

willing to meet his eye, she turned quickly and made her escape through the open door.

In the bright glow of that lovely spring day, the calm face of Ulpian Grey seemed scarcely older than on the afternoon when he came to make the farm his home; and though paler, and ciphered over by the leaden finger of anxiety, it indexed little of the long, fierce strife, that conscience had waged with heart.

Lighter and more impulsive natures expend themselves in spasmodic and violent ebullitions, but the great deep of this man's serene character had never stirred, until the one mighty love of his life had lashed it into a tempest that tossed his hopes like sea-froth, and finally engulfed the only rosy dream of wedded happiness that had ever flushed his quiet, solitary, sedate existence.

Having kept his heart in holy subjection to the law of Christ, he did not quail and surrender when the great temptation rose, bearing the banner of insurrection; but sternly and dauntlessly fronted the shock, and kept inviolate the citadel, garrisoned by an invincible and consecrated will.

The yearning tenderness of his strong, tranquil soul, had enfolded Mrs. Carlyle, drawing her more and more into the penetralia of his affection; but from the hour in which he learned her history he had torn away the clinging tendrils of love, — had endeavored to expel her from his heart, and to stifle its wail for the lost idol.

Week after week, month after month, he had driven every day within sight of the blue smoke that curled above the trees at "Solitude," but never even for an instant checked his horse to gaze longingly towards the Eden whence he had voluntarily exiled himself.

There were hours when his heart ached for the sight of that white face he had loved so madly, and the sound of the mournfully sweet voice, — and his hand trembled at the recollection of the soft, cold, snowy fingers, that once thrilled his palms; but he treated these utterances of his heart as merci-

Digitized by Google

lessly as the hunter who cheers his dogs in the chase where the death-cry of the victim rings above bark and halloo.

No wall of division, no sea of separation, would have proved so effectual, so insurmountable, as his own firm resolve that his earthly path should never cross that of one whom God's statutes had set apart until death annulled the decree. In this torturing ordeal he was strengthened by the conviction that he alone suffered for his folly, — that Mrs. Carlyle was a stranger to feelings that robbed him of sleep, and clouded his days, — that the heaving tide of his devoted love had broken against her frozen heart as idly as the surges of the sea that die in foam upon the dreary, mysterious ruins of the Serapeon at Pozzuoli.

In the silent watches of the night, as he pondered the brief, beautiful vision that had so completely fascinated him, he reverently thanked God that the woman he loved had never reciprocated his affection, and was not sitting in the ashes of desolation, mourning his absence. Striving to interest himself more and more in Stanley and Jessie, who had become inordinately fond of him, his thoughts continually reverted to Salome, and that subtle sympathy which springs from the "fellow-being," that makes us "wondrous kind" to those whose pangs are fierce as ours, began faintly and shyly, but surely, to assert itself. A shadowy, intangible self-reproach brooded like a phantom over his generous heart, when, amidst the uncertainty that seemed to overhang the orphan's fate, he remembered the numberless manifestations of almost idolatrous affection which he had coldly repulsed.

In the earnest interest that day by day deepened in the absent girl, there was no pitiable vanity, no inflated self-love, but a stern realization of the anguish and humiliation that must now be her portion, and a magnanimous eagerness to endeavor to cheer a heart whose severest woes had sprung from his indifference.

More than a year had elapsed, and no letter had ever reached him, — not even a message in her two brief epistles to Stanley

Digitized by Google

and Dr. Grey missed the bright, perverse element that no longer thwarted him at every turn.

He longed to see the proud, girlish face, with its flashing eyes, and red lips, and the haughty toss of the large, handsome head; and the angry tones of her voice would have been welcome sounds in the house where she had so long tyrannized. To-day, as Ulpian Grey sat in his own little sitting-room, his eyes were fixed on a copy of Rembrandt's *Nicholas Tulp*, which hung over the mantelpiece; but the mysteries of anatomy no longer riveted his attention, and his thoughts were busy with memories of a fond though wayward girl, whom his indifference had driven to foreign lands, — to unknown and fearful perils.

Through the windows stole the breath of Salome's violets, and the sweet, spicy odor of the Belgian honeysuckle that she had planted and twined around the mossy columns that supported the gallery; and with a sigh he closed his eyes, shut out the anatomy of flesh, and began the dissection of emotions.

Could Salome's radiant face brighten his home, and win his heart from its devouring regret? Would it be possible for him to give her the place whence he had ejected Mrs. Carlyle? Could he ever persuade himself to call that fair, passionate young thing, that capricious, obstinate, maliciously perverse girl, — his wife?

Involuntarily he frowned, for while pity pleaded for the refugee from home and happiness, the man's honest nature scouted all shams, and he acknowledged to himself that he could never feel the need of her lips or hands, — could never insult her womanhood, or degrade his own nature, by folding to his heart one whose touch possessed no magnetism, whose presence exerted no spell over his home.

Salome, his friend, his adopted sister, he wished to discover, to claim, and restore to the household; but Salome, his wife, — was a monstrous imaginary incubus that appalled and repelled him.

The difficulties that presented themselves at the outset of his

Digitized by Google

search would have discouraged a less resolute temperament, but it was part of his wise philosophy, that —

> "We overstate the ills of life. We walk upon
> The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
> And pant like climbers."

As a pitying older brother, he thought of Salome's many foibles, — of her noble intentions and ignoble executions, — of her few feeble triumphs, her numerous egregious failures in the line of duty; and loving Christian charity pleaded eloquently for her, whispering to his generous soul, "We know the ships that come with streaming pennons into the immortal ports; but we know little of the ships that have taken fire on the way thither, — that have gone down at sea."

What pure friendship could accomplish he would not withhold, and life at the farm was not so attractive now that he felt regret at the prospect of temporary absence.

The disappointment that had so rudely smitten to the earth the one precious hope born of his acquaintance with "Solitude," had no power to embitter his nature, — to drape the world in drab, or to shroud the future with gloom; and though his noble face was sadder and paler, Christian faith and resignation rang blessed chimes of peace in heart and soul, and made his life a hallowed labor of love for the needy and grief-stricken. To-day, as he sat alone at the south window, he could overlook the fields of "Grassmere," where the rich promise of golden harvest "filled in all beauty and fulness the emerald cup of the hills," and the waving grain rippled in light and shade like the billows of some distant sunset sea. Basking in the balmy sunshine, and contemplating his approaching departure for Europe, a sudden longing seized him to look once more on the face of Vashti Carlyle, before he bade farewell to his home.

She was in feeble health, and might not survive his absence, and, moreover, what harm could result from one final visit to "Solitude," — from a few parting words to its desolate mistress? She had sent a message through Robert, that she would

Digitized by Google

be glad to see Dr. Grey whenever he could find leisure to call, and now hungry heart and soul cried out savagely, —

"Why not? Why not?"

His heavy brows knitted a little, and his mouth grew rigid as iron, but after some moments the lips relaxed, and with a sad, patient smile, he repeated those stirring words of Richter to Herman, — "Suffer like a man the Alp-pressure of fate. Trust yourself upon the broad, shining wings of your *faith*, and make them bear you over the Dead Sea, so as not to fall spiritually dead within."

"No, no, Ulpian Grey, — keep yourself 'unspotted from the world.' Strangle that one temptation which borrows the garments of an angel of light and mercy, and dogs you, sleeping and waking. I will see her no more till death snaps her fetters, and I can meet her in the presence of God, who alone can know what separation costs me. May He grant her strength to bear her lonely lot, and give me grace to be patient even unto the end, bringing no reproach on the sacred faith I profess."

It was the final struggle between love and duty, and though the vanquished heart wailed piteously, exultant conscience, like Jupiter of old, triumphantly applauded, "Evan, evoe!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"WANTED! — Information of Salome Owen, who will confer a favor on her friends, and secure a handsome legacy by calling at No. — ———."

"Dr. Grey, for six months this advertisement has appeared every morning in two of the most popular journals in Paris, and as it has elicited no clew to her whereabouts, I am reluctantly compelled to believe that she is no longer in France."

Mr. Granville refolded the newspaper, and busied himself in filling and lighting his meerschaum.

Digitized by Google

"By whom was that notice inserted?"

"By M. de Baillu, the agent and banker of Mr. Minge of Boston, who was warmly and sincerely attached to your *protégée*, and earnestly endeavored to marry her. When she left Palermo, Mr. Minge came to this city and solicited my aid in discovering her retreat."

"Pardon me, but why did he apply to you?"

"Simply because he knew that I was an old acquaintance, and he had seen me with her, when she first came from America."

"How did you ascertain her presence in Paris?"

"Accidentally; one night, at the opera, whither she accompanied Professor V——, I recognized her, and of course made myself known. To what shall I ascribe the honor of this rigid cross-questioning?"

"To reasons which I shall very freely give you. But first, permit me to beg that you will resume your narrative at the point where I interrupted you. I wish to learn all that can be told concerning Mr. Minge."

"He was an elderly man of ordinary appearance, but extraordinary fortune, and seemed completely fascinated by Salome's beauty. He offered a large reward to the police for any clew that would enable him to discover her, and finally found the physician whom she had consulted with reference to some disease of the throat, which occasioned the loss of her voice. He had prescribed for her several times, but knew nothing of her lodging-place, as she always called at his office; and finally, without assigning any reason, her visits ceased. Mr. Minge redoubled his exertions, and at last found her in one of the hospitals connected with a convent. The Sisters of Charity informed him that one bleak day when the rain was falling drearily, they chanced to see a woman stagger and drop on the pavement before their door, and, hurrying to her assistance, discovered that she had swooned from exhaustion. A bundle of unfinished needle-work was hidden under her shawl, and they soon ascertained that she was delirious from some low typhus fever that had utterly prostrated her. For several

Digitized by Google

weeks she was dangerously ill, and was just able to sit up when Mr. Minge discovered her. He told me that it was distressing and painful beyond expression to witness her humiliation, her wounded pride, her defiant rejection of his renewed offer of marriage. One day he took his sister Constance and a minister of the gospel to the hospital, and implored Salome to become his wife, then and there. He said she wept bitterly, and thanked him, thanked his sister also, but solemnly assured him she could never marry any one, — she would sooner starve in the —"

Dr. Grey raised his hand, signalling for silence, and for some moments he leaned his forehead against the chair directly in front of him.

Mr. Granville cleared his throat several times, and loosened his neck-tie, which seemed to impede his breathing.

"Shall I go on? There is little more to tell."

"If you please, Granville."

"Mr. Minge would not abandon the hope of finally persuading her to accept his hand, but next day when he called to inquire about her health, and to request the sisters to watch her movements, and prevent her escape, he was shocked to learn that she had disappeared the previous night, leaving a few lines written in pencil on a handkerchief, in which she had wrapped her superb suit of hair. They were addressed to the Sisters of Charity, and briefly expressed her gratitude for their kindness in providing for her wants, while she assured them that as soon as possible she would return and compensate them for their services in her behalf. Meantime, knowing the high price of hair, she had carefully cut off her own, which was unusually long and thick, and tendered it in part payment. When she was taken into the building, her nurse found concealed in her dress a very elegant watch, bearing her name in diamond letters, and she requested that the sisters would hold it in pawn, until she was able to redeem it. During her illness, it had been locked up, and they supposed she left it, fearing that an application for it would arouse suspicions of her intended flight. Mr. Minge bought the hair and hand-

Digitized by Google

kerchief, and, after a liberal remuneration for their care of the invalid, he took charge of the watch, and left his address to be given her when she called for her property. That her mind had become seriously impaired, there can be little doubt; since nothing but insanity can explain her refusal to accept one of the handsomest estates in America. Unfortunately, a few days subsequent to her departure from the hospital, Mr. Minge was taken very violently ill with pneumonia, and died. Conscious of his condition, he prepared a codicil to his will, and bequeathed to Salome twenty-five thousand dollars, and an elegant house and lot in New-York City. He exacted from his sister a solemn promise that she would leave no means untried to ferret out the wanderer, to whom he was so devotedly attached; and, should all efforts fail, at the expiration of five years the legacy should revert to the hospital which had sheltered her in the hour of her destitution. The watch he left with his sister Constance; the hair, he ordered buried with him. Three months have elapsed, and no tidings have reached Miss Minge, who remains in Paris for the purpose of complying with her brother's dying request."

"My poor, perverse Salome! To what desperate extremities has she been reduced by her unfortunate wilfulness. Gerard, will you tell me frankly your own conjecture concerning her fate?"

"If alive, I believe she has left Europe."

"Upon what do you base your supposition?"

"Mr. Minge was convinced that her attachment to some one in America was the insurmountable barrier to his success as a suitor; and, if so, she probably returned to her native land. Dr. Grey, I will speak candidly to you of a matter which has doubtless given you some disquiet. Muriel informs me that you have no confidence in the sincerity of my attachment to her, and that upon that fact is founded your refusal to allow the consummation of our engagement, so long as she continues your ward. I confess I am not free from censure, but, while I have acted weakly, I am not devoid of principle. Sir, I was strangely and powerfully attracted to Salome Owen,

Digitized by Google

and she exerted a species of fascination over me which I scarcely endeavored to resist. In an evil hour, infatuated by her face and her marvellous voice, I was wild enough to offer her my hand, and resolved to ask Muriel to release me. Dr. Grey, even at my own expense, I wish to exonerate Salome, who never for an instant, by word or look, encouraged my madness. She repulsed my advances, refused every attention, and when I rashly uttered words, which, I admit, were treasonable to Muriel, she almost overwhelmed me with her fiery contempt and indignation, — threatening to acquaint Muriel with my inconstancy, and appealing to my honor as a gentleman to keep inviolate my betrothal vows. Dr. Grey, if my heart temporarily wandered from its allegiance to your ward, it was not Salome's fault, for in every respect her conduct towards me was that of a noble, unselfish woman, who scorned to gratify her vanity at the expense of another's happiness. She shamed me out of my folly, and her stern honesty and nobility saved me from a brief and humiliating career of dishonorable duplicity. Whether living or dead, I owe this tribute to the pure character of Salome Owen."

"Thank Heaven! I had faith in her. I believed her too generous to stoop to a flirtation with the lover of her friend; and, deplorable as was your own weakness, I am rejoiced, Gerard, to find that you have conquered it. Tell Muriel all that you have confided to me, and in her hands we will leave the decision."

"Do you intend to prosecute the search which has proved so fruitless?"

"I do. She has not returned to America, — she is here somewhere; and, living or dead, I must and will find her."

Dr. Grey seemed lost in perplexing thought for some time; then drew a sheet of paper before him, and wrote, "Ulpian Grey wishes to see Salome Owen, in order to communicate some facts which will induce her return to her family; and he hopes she will call immediately at No. Rue ——."

"Gerard, please be so good as to have this inserted in all

Digitized by Google

the leading journals in the city; and give me the address of Mr. Minge's agent."

At the expiration of a month, spent in the most diligent yet unsuccessful efforts to obtain some information of the wanderer, Dr. Grey began to feel discouraged, — to yield to melancholy forebodings that an untimely death had ended her struggles and suffering.

Once, while pacing the walks in the Champs-Elysées, he caught a glimpse of a face that recalled Salome's, and started eagerly forward; but it proved that of a Parisian *bonne*, who was romping with her juvenile charge.

Again, one afternoon, as he came out of the Church of St. Sulpice, his heart bounded at sight of a woman who leaned against the railing, and watched the play of the fountain. When he approached her and peered eagerly into her countenance, blue eyes and yellow curls mocked his hopes. One morning, while he walked slowly along the *Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré*, his attention was attracted by the glitter of pretty baubles in the *Maison de la Pensée*, and he entered the establishment to purchase something for Jessie.

While waiting for his parcel, a woman came out of a rear apartment and passed into the street, and, almost snatching his package from the counter, he followed.

A few yards in advance was a graceful but thin figure, clad in a violet-colored muslin, with a rather dingy silk scarf wound around her shoulders. A straw hat, with a wreath of faded pink roses, drooped over her face, and streamers of black lace hung behind, while over the whole she had thrown a thin gray veil.

Dr. Grey had not seen a feature, but the *pose* of the shoulders, the haughty poise of the head, the quick, nervous, elastic step, and, above all, the peculiar, free, childish swinging of the left arm, made his despondent heart throb with renewed hope.

Keeping sufficiently near not to lose sight of her, he walked on and on, down cross streets, up narrow alleys, towards a quarter of the city with which he was unacquainted. The woman never looked back, rarely turned her head, even to

Digitized by Google

glance at those who passed her, and only once she paused before a flower-stall, and seemed to price a bunch of carnations, which she smelled, laid down again, and then hurried on.

Dr. Grey quickly paid for the cluster, and hastened after her.

In turning a corner, she dropped a small parcel that she had carried under her scarf, and as she stooped to pick it up, her veil floated off. She caught it ere it reached the ground, and when she raised her hands to spread it over her hat, the loose open sleeves of her dress slipped back, and there, on the left arm, was a long, zigzag scar, like a serpentine bracelet.

With great difficulty Dr. Grey stifled a cry of joy, and waited until she had gained some yards in advance.

The woman was so absorbed in reverie that she did not notice the steady tramp of her pursuer, but as the number of persons on the street gradually diminished, he prudently fell back, fearing lest her suspicion should be excited.

At a sudden bend in the crooked alley which she rapidly threaded, he lost sight of her, and, running a few yards, he turned the angle just in time to see the flutter of her dress and scarf, as she disappeared through a postern, that opened in a crumbling brick wall.

Above the gate a battered tin sign swung in the wind, and dim letters, almost effaced by elemental warfare, announced, "*Adèle Aubin, Blanchisseuse.*"

Dr. Grey passed through the postern, and found himself in a narrow, dark court, near a tall, dingy, dilapidated house, where a girl ten years of age sat playing with two ragged, untidy children.

It was a dreary, comfortless, uninviting place, and a greenish slime overspread the lower portions of the wall, and coated the uneven pavement.

From the girl, who chatted with genuine French volubility and freedom, Dr. Grey learned that her father was an *attaché* of a barber-shop, and her mother a washer and renovater of laces and embroideries. The latter was absent, and, in answer to his inquiries, the child informed him that an upper room in this cheerless building was occupied by a young female lodger, who held no intercourse with its other inmates.

Digitized by Google

Placing a five-franc piece in her hand, the visitor asked the name of the lodger, but the girl replied that she was known to them only as "*La Dentellière*," and lived quite alone in the right-hand room at the top of the third flight of stairs.

The parley had already occupied twenty minutes, when Dr. Grey cut it short by mounting the narrow, winding steps. The atmosphere was close, and redolent of the fumes of dishes not so popular in America as in France, and he saw that the different doors of this old tenement were rented to lodgers who cooked, ate, and slept in the same apartment. At the top of the last dim flight of steps, Dr. Grey paused, almost out of breath; and found himself on a narrow landing-place, fronting two attic rooms. The one on the right was closed, but as he softly took the bolt in his hand and turned it, there floated through the key-hole the low subdued sound of a sweet voice, humming "*Infelice*."

It was not the deep, rich, melting voice, that had arrested his drive when first he heard it on the beach, but a plaintive, thrilling echo, full of pathos, yet lacking power; like the notes of birds when moulting-season ends, and the warblers essay their old strains. Cautiously he opened the door wide enough to permit him to observe what passed within.

The room was large, low, and irregularly shaped, with neither fire-place nor stove, and only one dormer window opening to the south, and upon a wide waste of tiled roofs and smoking chimneys. The floor was bare, except a strip of faded carpet stretched in front of a small single bedstead; and the additional furniture consisted of two chairs, a tall table where hung a mirror, and a washstand that held beside bowl and pitcher a candlestick and china cup. On the table were several books, a plate and knife, and a partially opened package disclosed a loaf of bread, some cheese, and an apple.

In front of the window a piece of plank had been rudely fastened, and here stood two wooden boxes containing a few violets, mignonette, and one very luxuriant rose-geranium.

The faded blue cambric curtain was twisted into a knot, and as it was now nearly noon, the sun shone in and made a patch of gold on the stained and dusky floor.

Digitized by Google

On the bed lay the straw hat, garlanded with roses that had lost their primitive tints, and before the window in a low chair sat the lonely lodger.

On her knees rested a cushion, across which was stretched a parchment pattern bristling with pins, and with bobbins she was swiftly knitting a piece of gossamer lace, by throwing the fine threads around the pins.

Over the floor floated her delicate lilac dress, and the sleeves were looped back to escape the forest of pins.

Dr. Grey had only a three-quarter view of the face that bent over the cushion, and though it was sadly altered in every lineament, — was whiter and thinner than he had ever seen it, — yet it was impossible to mistake the emaciated features of Salome Owen.

The large, handsome head, had been shorn of its crown of glossy braids that once encircled it like a jet tiara, and the short locks clustered with childlike grace and beauty around the gleaming white brow and temples.

There was not a vestige of color in the whilom scarlet mouth, whose thin lines were now scarcely perceptible; and, in the finer oval of her cheeks, and along the polished chin, the purplish veins showed their delicate tracery. The hands were waxen and almost transparent, and the figure was wasted beyond the boundaries of symmetry.

In the knot of ribbon that fastened her narrow linen collar, she had arranged a sprig of mignonette, that now dropped upon the cushion as she bent over it. She paused, brushed it off, and for a few seconds her beautiful hazel eyes were fixed on the blue sky that bordered her window.

The whole expression of her countenance had changed, and the passionate defiance of other days had given place to a sad, patient hopelessness, touching indeed, when seen on her proud features. Slowly she threw her bobbins, and a fragment of "*Infelice*" seemed to drift across her trembling lips, that showed some lines of bitterness in their time-chiselling.

As Dr. Grey watched her, tears which he could not restrain

Digitized by Google

trickled down his face, and he was starting forward, when she said, as if communing with her own desolate soul,—

"I wonder if I am growing superstitious. Last night I dreamed incessantly of Jessie and home, and to-day I can not help thinking that something has happened there. Home! When people no longer have a home, how hard it is to forget that blessed home which sheltered them in the early years. Homeless! that is the dreariest word that human misery ever conjectured or human language clothed. Never mind, Salome Owen, when God snatched your voice from you, He became responsible; and your claims are like the ravens and sparrows, and He must provide. After all, it matters little where we are housed here in the clay, and Hobbs was astute when he selected for the epitaph on his tombstone, 'This is the true philosopher's stone.' Home! Ah, if I sadly missed my heart's home, here in the flesh, I shall surely find it up yonder in the blessed land of blue."

A tear glided down her cheek, glistened an instant on her chin, and fell on her pattern. She brushed it away, and smiled sorrowfully,—

"It is ill-omened to sprinkle bridal lace with tears. Some day this fine web will droop around a bride's white shoulders and after a time it may serve to deck the cold limbs of some dead child. If I could only have my shroud now, I would not make lace a *desideratum;* serge or sackcloth would be welcome. Patience,—

> . . . . 'What if the bread
> Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
> To meet the flints? At least it may be said,
> Because the way is *short*, I thank thee, God!'"

She partially rose in her chair, and took from the table a volume of poems. After some search, she found the desired passage, and, rocking herself to and fro, she read it aloud in a low, measured tone,—

> "'O dreary life!' we cry, 'O dreary life!'
> And still the generations of the birds
> Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds

Digitized by Google

Serenely live, while we are keeping strife
With heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle! Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land, savannah-swards
Unweary sweep, — hills watch unworn; and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees,
To show above the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory. *O thou God of old,*
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these!
But even so much patience, as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through the heat and cold.'"

The book slipped from her fingers and fell upon the floor, and with a sob the girl bowed her head in her hands.

Quickly the intruder glided unseen into the room, and stood at the back of her chair.

He knew she was praying, and almost breathlessly waited several minutes.

At last she raised her face, and while tears trembled on her lashes, she said meekly, —

"I ought not to complain and repine. I will be patient and trust God; for I can afford to suffer all through time, provided I may spend eternity with Christ and Dr. Grey."

"Oh, Salome! Thank God, we shall be separated neither in time nor in eternity! Dear wanderer, come back to your brother!"

He stepped before her, and involuntarily held out his arms.

She neither screamed nor fainted, but sprang to her feet, and a rapture that beggars all description irradiated her worn, weary, pallid face.

"Is it really you? Oh! a thousand times I have dreamed that I saw you, — stood by you; but when I tried to touch you, there was nothing but empty air! Oh, Dr. Grey! — my Dr. Grey! Am I only dreaming, here in the sunshine, or is it you bodily? Did you care for me a *little?* Did you come to find *me?*"

She grasped his arm, swept her hands up and down his sleeve, and then he saw her reel, and shut her eyes, and shudder.

"My poor child, I came to Paris solely to hunt for my wayward Salome, and, thank God! I have found her."

Digitized by Google

He put his arm around her, and placed her head against his shoulder.

Ah, how his generous heart ached, as he noted the hungry delight with which her splendid eyes lingered on his features, and the convulsive tenacity with which she clung to him, trembling with excess of joy that brought back carmine to her wanted lips and carnation bloom to her blanched cheeks.

He heard her whispering, and knew it was a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessing of his presence.

But very soon a change came over her sparkling, happy face, like an inky cloud across a noon sky, and he felt a shiver stealing through her form.

"Let me go! You said once, that when I came to Europe to enter on my professional career, you wished never to touch my hands again, — you would consider them polluted."

"Dear Salome, I recant all those harsh, unjust words, which were uttered when I was not fully aware of the latent strength of your character. Since then, I have learned much from Professor V——, and from Gerard Granville, that assures me my noble friend is all I could desire her, — that she has grandly conquered her faults, and is worthy of the admiration, the perfect confidence, the earnest affection, which her adopted brother offers her. Your pure, true heart makes pure hands, and as such I reverently salute them."

He took her hands, raised and kissed them respectfully, tenderly.

She hid her burning face on his bosom, and there was a short pause.

"Salome, sit down and let me talk to you of home, — your home. Have you no questions to ask about your pet sister and brother?"

He attempted to release himself, but she clung to him, and clasping her arms around his neck, said in a strained, husky tone, —

"Dr. Grey, did you bring your — your wife to Paris?"

"I have no wife."

She uttered a thrilling cry of delight, threw her head back, and gazed steadily into his clear, calm, blue eyes.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, sir, they told me you had married Mrs. Gerome."

He placed her in the chair, and kneeling down beside her, took her quivering face in his palms and touched her forehead softly with his lips.

"The only woman I ever wished to make my wife is bound for life to a worthless husband. Salome, I loved her before I knew this fact; and, since I learned (soon after your departure) that she was separated from the man whom she had wedded, I have not seen her, although she still resides at 'Solitude.' Salome, I shall never marry, and I ask you now to come back to Jessie and Stanley, who will soon require your care and guidance, for it is my intention to return to the position in the U. S. naval service, which only Janet's feeble health induced me to resign. God bless you, dear child! I wish you were indeed my own sister, for I am growing very proud of my brave, honest friend, — my patient lace-weaver."

The girl's head sank lower and lower until it touched her knees, and sobs rendered her words scarcely audible.

"If you deem me worthy to be called your friend, it is because of your example, your influence. Oh, Dr. Grey, — but for you, — but for my hope of meeting you in the kingdom of Christ, I shudder to think what I might have been! Under all circumstances I have been guided by what I imagined would have been your wishes, — your advice; and my reward is rich indeed! Your confidence, your approbation! Earth holds no recompense half so precious."

"Thank God! my prayers have been abundantly answered, my highest hopes of your future fully realized. Henceforth, let us with renewed energy labor faithfully in the vast, whitening fields of Him who declares, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.'"

"O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
To cheer thee and to right thee if thou roam,
Not with lost toil thou laborest through the night,
Thou makest the heaven thou hopest indeed thy home."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"SAD CASE OF MANIA A POTU."

"WATCHMAN McDonough reports that, late last night, he picked up, on the sidewalk, the insensible body of Maurice Carlyle, who showed some signs of returning animation after his removal to Station House No. ——. A physician was called in, and every effort made to save the unfortunate victim of intemperance; but medical skill was inadequate to arrest the work of many years of excess, and before daylight the wretched man expired in dreadful convulsions. Coroner Boutwell held an inquest on the body, and the verdict rendered was 'Death from *mania a potu*.' Mr. Carlyle was well known in this city, where for many years he was an ornament to society, and a general favorite in the fashionable and mercantile circle in which he moved. Of numbers who were once the recipients of his bounty and hospitality, none offered succor in the hour of adversity, and among all his former friends none were found to cheer or pity in the last ordeal to which flesh is subjected. The melancholy fate of Maurice Carlyle furnishes another illustration of the mournful truth that the wages of intemperance are destitution and desertion."

Such was the startling announcement, which, under the head of "Police Report," Dr. Grey read and re-read in a prominent New-York paper that had accidentally remained for some days unopened on his desk, and was dated nearly a month previous. Locking the door of his office, he sat down to collect his bewildered thoughts, and to quiet the tumult in his throbbing heart.

During the two years that had drearily worn away since his last interview with Mrs. Carlyle, he had sternly forbidden his mind to dwell on its brief dream of happiness, and by a life of unusually active benevolence endeavored to forget the one episode which alone had power to disquiet and sadden him.

He had philosophically schooled himself to the calm, unmur

Digitized by Google

muring acceptance of his lonely destiny, and looked forward to a life solitary yet not unhappy, although uncheered by the love and companionship which every man indulges the instinctive hope will sooner or later crown his existence.

Now heart and conscience, so long at deadly feud, suddenly signalled a truce, clasped hands, embraced cordially. How radiant the world looked, — with what wondrous glory the future had in the twinkling of an eye robed itself. The woman he had loved was stainless and free, and how could she long resist the pleadings of his famished heart?

He would win her from cynicism and isolation, would melt her frozen nature in the genial atmosphere of his pure and constant affection, and interweave her aimless, sombre life with the busy, silvery web of his own.

After forty years, God would grant him home, and wife, and hearthstone peace.

What a flush and sparkle stole to this grave man's olive cheek, and calm, deep blue eyes!

Ah! how hungrily he longed for the touch of her hand, the sight of her face; and, snatching his hat, he put the paper in his pocket, and hurried towards "Solitude."

In the holy hush of that hazy autumnal afternoon, nature — *Magna Mater*, —

> "The altar-curtains of whose hills
> Are sunset's purple air,"
> "Who dips in the dim light of setting suns
> The spacious skirts of that vast robe of hers
> That widens ever in the wondrous west,"

seemed slumbering and dreaming away the day.

The forests were gaudy in their painted shrouds of scarlet and yellow leaves, and long, feathery flakes of purple bloom nodded over crimson berries, emerald mosses, and golden-hearted asters.

Only a few weeks previous, Dr. Grey had driven along that road, and, while the echo of harvest hymns rang on the hay-scented air, had asked himself how men and women could

Digitized by Google

become so completely absorbed in temporal things, ignoring the solemn and indisputable fact of the brevity of human life and the restricted dominion of man, —

> "Whose part in all the pomp that fills
> The circuit of the summer hills
> Is, that his grave is green."

But to-day all sober-hued reflections were exorcised by the rapturous *Jubilate* that hope was singing through the sunlit chambers of his happy heart; and when he entered the grounds of "Solitude" they seemed bathed in that soft glamour, that witching "light that never was on sea or land."

As he sprang from his buggy and opened the little gate leading into the *parterre*, Robert came slowly forward, bearing a basket filled with a portion of the crimson apples that flushed the orchard, just beyond the low hedge.

"You could not have chosen a better time to come, Dr. Grey; and if I were allowed to have my way you would have been here last night. Were you sent for at last, or was it a lucky chance that brought you?"

"Merely an accident, as I received no summons. Robert, how is your mistress?"

"God only knows, sir; I am sure I never can tell how she really is. She has not seemed well since she took that journey to the North, and for two weeks past she appears to have been slipping down by inches into her grave. She neither eats nor sleeps, and for the last three nights has not lain down, — so old Ruth, the housekeeper, tells me. Yesterday I begged my mistress to let me go for you, but she smiled that awful freezing smile that strikes to the very marrow of my bones, worse than December sleet, — and raised her finger so: and said, 'At your peril, Robert. Mind your orchard, man, and I will take care of myself. I want neither doctors nor nurses, and only desire that you, and Ruth, and Anna, will attend to your respective duties and let me be quiet. All will soon be well with me.' I killed a partridge, had it nicely broiled, and carried it to her; and she thanked me, and made a pretence of eating the wing,

Digitized by Google

just to please me; but when the waiter was taken away to the kitchen, I found all the bird on the plate. This morning, just before daylight, I heard her playing a wild, mournful thing on the piano, that sounded like a dirge or a wail; and Ruth says when she went into the parlor to open the blinds, she found her praying, and thinks she was on her knees for an hour. Please God! sometimes I wish she was in heaven with my mother, for she will never see any peace in this life."

"What seems to be the disease?"

"Heart-ache."

"You should have come and told me this long ago."

"And pray to what purpose, Dr. Grey? She vowed she would allow no human being to cross her threshold, except the servants, and I would sooner undertake to curl a steel, or make ringlets out of a pair of tongs, than bend her will when once she takes a stand. Humph! My mistress is no willow wand, and is about as easily moved as the church-steeple, or the stone-tower of the lighthouse."

"Has she recently received letters that contained tidings which excited or distressed her?"

"A letter came last week, but I know nothing of its contents. You need not go into the house if you wish to find her, for about an hour and a half ago I saw her come out into the grounds, and she never goes in till the lamps are lighted."

An anxious look clouded for an instant Dr. Grey's countenance, but undaunted hope sang on of the hours of hallowed communion that the future held, while in her invalid condition he assumed the care and guardianship of his beloved; and, turning into the lawn, he eagerly searched the winding walks for some trace of her, some flutter of her garments, some faint, subtle odor of orange-flowers or tube-roses.

Here and there clusters of purple, pink, and orange chrysanthemums flecked the lawn with color; and a flower-stand, covered with china jars that held geraniums, seemed almost a pyramid of flame, from the profusion of scarlet blooms.

The sun had gone down behind the waving line of low hills, where,—

Digitized by Google

"Thinned to amber, rimmed with silver,
Clouds in the distance dwell,
Clouds that are cool, for all their color,
Pure as a rose-lipped shell.
Fleets of wool in the upper heavens
Gossamer wings unfurl;
Sailing so high they seem but sleeping
Over yon bar of pearl."

Still as crystal was the sapphire sea that mirrored that quiet, sapphire sky, and not a murmur, not a ripple, stirred the evening air or the yellow sands that stretched for miles along the winding coast.

When Dr. Grey had partially crossed the lawn, he glanced towards the marble temple that gleamed against the dark background of deodars, and saw a woman sitting on the steps of the tomb. Softly he approached and entered the mausoleum by an arch on the opposite side; but, notwithstanding his cautious tread, he startled a white pigeon that had perched on the altar, where fresh violets, heliotrope, and snowy sprigs of nutmeg-geranium were leaning over the scallopped edge of the Venetian glasses, and distilling perfume in their delicate chalices.

Mrs. Carlyle had brought her floral tribute to the sepulchral urn, and, having carefully arranged her daily Arkja, had seated herself on the steps to rest.

From the two sentinel poplars that guarded the front, golden leaves were sifting down on the marble floor, and three or four had drifted upon the lap of the quiet figure, while one, bright and rich as autumn gilding could make it, rested like a crown on the silver waves that covered her head.

Down the shining steps trailed the folds of the white merino robe, and around her shoulders was wrapped the blue crape shawl, while a cluster of violets seemed to have slipped from her fingers, and strewed themselves at random on her dress.

Softly Dr. Grey drew near, and his voice was tremulously tender, as he said,—

"Mrs. Carlyle, no barrier divides us now."

She did not speak, or turn her queenly head, and he laid his hand caressingly on the glistening gray hair.

Digitized by Google

"My darling, my first and only love — my brave, beautiful 'Agla,' may I not tell you, at last, what conscience once forbade my uttering?"

As motionless and silent as the sculptured poppies above her, she took no notice of his passionate pleading, and he sprang down one step directly in front of her.

The white face was turned to the sea, and the large, wide, wonderfully lovely yet mournful gray eyes were gazing fixedly across the waste of water, at a filmy cloud as fine as lace, that like a silver netting caught the full October moon which was lifting itself in the pearly east.

The long black lashes did not droop, nor the steady eyes waver, and with a horrible foreboding Dr. Grey seized her hands. They were rigid and icy. He stooped, caught her to his bosom, and pressed his lips to hers, but they were colder than the marble column against which she leaned; for, one hour before, Vashti Carlyle had fronted her God.

Alone in the autumn evening, sitting there with the golden poplar leaves drifting over her, the desolate woman had held her last communion with the watching ocean that hushed its murmuring, to see her die; and, laying down the galling burden of her sunless, dreary life, she had joyfully and serenely "put on immortality" in that everlasting rest, where "there was no more sea, no more death, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

Ah! beautiful and holy was —

> "That peaceful face wherein all past distress
> Had melted into perfect loveliness."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXV.

SINCE that October day when Ulpian Grey sat on the steps of the tomb, holding in his arms the beautiful white form, whom in life God had denied him the privilege of touching, six months had drifted slowly; yet time had not softened the blow, that, while almost crushing his tender, unselfish heart, had no power to shake the faith which was so securely anchored in Christ.

Among the papers found in Mrs. Carlyle's desk was one containing the request that Dr. Grey would superintend the erection of a handsome monument over the remains of her husband, whenever and wherever he chanced to die; and her will provided that her fortune should be appropriated as the nucleus of a relief fund for indigent painters.

Her own pictures, to which she had carefully affixed in delicate violet ciphers the name "Agla," she directed placed on exhibition in a New-York gallery, and ultimately sold for the benefit of the orphans of artists. To Robert she bequeathed a sum sufficient to maintain him in ease and comfort; and to Dr. Grey her escritoire, piano, books, and the sapphire ring she had always worn.

The latter was found in the silver casket, and had been folded in a sheet of paper containing these words, —

"According to the teachings of the Buddhists, 'the sapphire produces equanimity and peace of mind, as well as affording protection against envy and treachery. It produces also prayer and reconciliation with the Godhead, and brings more peace than any other gem of necromancy; *but he who would wear it must lead a pure and holy life.*' Finding my sapphire asp mockingly inefficacious in its traditional talismanic powers, I conclude that my melancholy career has been a violation of the stipulated condition, and therefore bequeath it to the only human being whom I deem worthy to wear it with any hope of success."

Digitized by Google

While awaiting orders from the naval department, Dr. Grey purchased "Solitude," whither he removed, with Muriel and Miss Dexter, and temporarily established himself, until the arrival of Mr. Granville.

Immediately after her return from Europe, Salome invested a portion of Mr. Minge's legacy in the site of the old mill that had fallen to ruin. Here she built a small but tasteful cottage *orné* on the spot where her father had died, and here, with Jessie and Stanley, she proposed to spend her winters; while Mark and Joel were placed at the "Grassmere Farm," a mile distant, and entrusted with its management until the younger children should attain their majority.

Too proud to accept the home which Dr. Grey had tendered her, Salome was earnestly endeavoring to imitate the noble example of self-abnegation that lifted him so far above all others whom she had ever known; and the most precious hope of her life was' to reach that exalted excellence which alone could compel his admiration and respect.

From the day of Mrs. Carlyle's death, the orphan had been a comparatively happy woman, for jealousy could not invade or desecrate the grave and its harmless sleeper; and Salome fervently thanked God, that, since she was denied the blessing of Dr. Grey's love, at least she had been spared the torture of seeing him the fond husband of another.

Time had deepened, but refined, purified, and consecrated her unconquerable affection for the only man who had ever commanded her reverence, and whose quiet influence had so happily remoulded her wayward, fiery nature.

There were seasons when the old element of innate perversity re-asserted itself, but the steady reproving gaze of his clear, true eyes, or the warning touch of his hand on her head, had sufficed to still the rising storm.

Conscientiously the passionate, exacting woman was striving to bring her heart and life into subjection to the law, — into conformity with the precepts of Christ; and though she was impulsive, proud Salome still, — the glaring blemishes in her character were gradually disappearing.

Digitized by Google

One bright balmy spring morning previous to the day appointed for Muriel's marriage, and for her guardian's departure for the fleet in Asiatic waters, where he had been assigned to duty, Dr. Grey drove up the avenue of elms and maples that led to Salome's pretty villa; and as he ascended the steps, Jessie sprang into his arms, and almost smothered him with caresses.

"Oh, doctor! something so wonderful has happened, — you never could guess, and I am as happy as a bee in a woodbine. Sister will tell you."

"Where is she?"

"In the parlor, waiting for you."

The child ran off to join Stanley, who was trying a new pony in the yard, and Dr. Grey went into the cool fragrant room, which was fitted up with more taste than in earlier years he would have ascribed to its owner.

Salome sat before the open piano, and at his entrance raised her face, which had been bowed almost to the ivory keys.

"Good morning, Dr. Grey. I am glad you have come to rejoice with me, and I was just thanking God for the unexpected restoration of my voice. Once when it seemed so necessary to me, He suddenly took it from me; and now, when it is a mere luxury to own it, He as unexpectedly gives it to me once more. Verily, — strange as it may appear, my voice is really better than when Professor V—— pronounced it the first contralto in Europe."

She had risen to greet him, and as he retained her hand in his, she stood close to him, looking earnestly into his face.

There were tears hanging like tremulous dewdrops on the long jet under-lashes, — and the bright red in her polished cheeks, and the crimson curves of her parted lips made a picture pleasant to contemplate.

"My dear child, I do indeed cordially congratulate you. God saw that your voice might possibly prove a snare and a curse, by ministering to false pride and exaggerated vanity, and in mercy and wisdom He temporarily deprived you of an instrument that threatened you with danger. Now that you are stronger, more prudent, and patient, He trusts you again with

Digitized by Google

one of the choicest blessings that can be conferred on a woman. You have deserved to recover it, and I joyfully unite my thanks with yours. Let me hear your voice once more."

Trembling with excess of happiness, she sat down and sang feelingly, eloquently, her favorite "*O mon Fernand;*" and, as he listened, Dr. Grey looked almost wonderingly at the beautiful flashing face, that had never seemed half so radiant before. There was marvellous witchery in her rich round flexible tones, that wound into the holy-of-holies of the man's great heart, and elevated his thoughts above the dross and dust of earth.

When she ended, he placed his soft palm tenderly on her head, and smoothed the glossy hair.

"I thank you inexpressibly. Sometimes when sad memories oppress me, how I shall long to have you charm them away by that magical spell that bears my thoughts from this world to the next. There are some songs which you must learn for my sake."

Ah! at that moment, as she stood there robed in a soft stainless white muslin, with a cluster of double pomegranate flowers glowing in her silky hair, the girl was very lovely, very attractive, so full of youthful grace, so winning in her beautiful enthusiasm, — yet Ulpian Grey's heart did not wander for an instant from one who slept dreamlessly under the sculptured urn on the marble altar of the mausoleum.

> "Why are the dead not dead? Who can undo
> What time hath done? Who can win back the wind?
> Beckon lost music from a broken lute?
> Renew the redness of a last year's rose?
> Or dig the sunken sunset from the deep?"

"Dr. Grey, if my voice can chase away one vexing thought, one wearying care or melancholy memory, I shall feel that I have additional reason to thank God for the precious gift."

"I have not seen you look so happy for three years. Indeed, my little sister, you have much for which to be grateful, and in the midst of your blessings try to recollect those grand words of

Digitized by Google

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, 'The soul is a God in exile.' My child, look to it that your expatriation ends with the shores of time, for —

> 'Yea, this is life; make this forenoon sublime,
> This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,
> And time is conquered, and thy crown is won.'"

For some seconds Salome did not speak, for the shadow on his countenance fell upon her heart, and looking reverently up at him, she thought of Richter's mournful *dictum*, — "Great souls attract sorrows, as mountains tempests."

"Dr. Grey, want of patience is the cause of half my difficulties and defeats, and plunges me continually into the slough of distrust and rebellious questioning. I find it so hard to stand still, and let God do his will, and work in his own way."

"My dear Salome, patience is only practical faith, and the want of it causes two-thirds of the world's woes. I often find it necessary to humble my own pride, and tame my restless spirit by recurring to the last words of Schiller, 'Calmer and calmer! many difficult things are growing plain and clear to me. Let us be patient.' Child, sing me one song more, and then come out and show me where you propose to place those grape arbors we spoke of yesterday. This is the last opportunity I shall have to direct your workmen.'

An hour later Salome fastened a sprig of Grand Duke jasmine in the button-hole of his coat, — shook hands with him for the day, and though she smiled in recognition of his final bow as he drove down the avenue, her thoughts were busy with the dreaded separation that awaited her on the morrow, and, while her lips were mute, the cry of her heart was, —

> . . . . "O Beloved, it is plain
> I am not of thy worth, nor for thy place.
> And yet because I love thee, I obtain
> From that same love this vindicating grace,
> To live on still in love, — and yet in vain, —
> To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face."

Digitized by Google

Dr. Grey spent the remainder of the day in visiting his patients, and as he rode from cottage to hovel, bidding adieu to those whose lives had so often been committed to his professional guardianship, he was received with tearful eyes, and trembling hands; and numerous benedictions were invoked upon his head.

Silver threads were beginning to weave an aureola in his chestnut hair, and the smooth white forehead showed incipient furrows, but the deep blue eyes were as tranquil and trusting as of yore, and full of tenderer light for the few he loved, for all in suffering and bereavement.

With a sublime and increasing faith in the overruling wisdom and mercy of God, he patiently and hopefully bore his loneliness and grievous loss, — comforting himself with the assurance that, "the evening of life brings with it its lamp;" and looking eagle-eyed across the storm-drenched plain of the present to the gleaming jasper walls of the Eternal Beyond.

. . . . . "My wine has run
Indeed out of my cup, and there is none
To gather up the bread of my repast
Scattered and trampled, — yet I find some good
In earth's green herbs, and streams that bubble up,
Clear from the darkling ground, — content until
I sit with angels before better food.
Dear Christ! when thy new vintage fills my cup,
This hand shall shake no more, nor that wine spill."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

1880. 1880.

G. W. CARLETON & CO.

NEW BOOKS

AND NEW EDITIONS,

RECENTLY ISSUED BY

G. W. CARLETON & Co., Publishers,

Madison Square, New York.

The Publishers, on receipt of price, will send any book on this Catalogue by mail, *postage free*.

All books [unless otherwise specified] are handsomely bound in cloth, with gilt backs suitable for libraries.

Mary J. Holmes' Works.

Tempest and Sunshine	$1 50	Darkness and Daylight	$1 50
English Orphans	1 50	Hugh Worthington	1 50
Homestead on the Hillside	1 50	Cameron Pride	1 50
'Lena Rivers	1 50	Rose Mather	1 50
Meadow Brook	1 50	Ethelyn's Mistake	1 50
Dora Deane	1 50	Millbank	1 50
Cousin Maude	1 50	Edna Browning	1 50
Marian Grey	1 50	West Lawn	1 50
Edith Lyle	1 50	Mildred	1 50
Daisy Thornton....(New)	1 50	Forrest House....(New)	1 50

Marion Harland's Works.

Alone	$1 50	Sunnybank	$1 50
Hidden Path	1 50	Husbands and Homes	1 50
Moss Side	1 50	Ruby's Husband	1 50
Nemesis	1 50	Phemie's Temptation	1 50
Miriam	1 50	The Empty Heart	1 50
At Last	1 50	Jessamine	1 50
Helen Gardner	1 50	From My Youth Up	1 50
True as Steel....(New)	1 50	My Little Love	1 50

Charles Dickens—15 Vols.—"Carleton's Edition."

Pickwick, and Catalogue	$1 50	David Copperfield	$1 50
Dombey and Son	1 50	Nicholas Nickleby	1 50
Bleak House	1 50	Little Dorrit	1 50
Martin Chuzzlewit	1 50	Our Mutual Friend	1 50
Barnaby Rudge—Edwin Drood	1 50	Curiosity Shop—Miscellaneous	1 50
Child's England—Miscellaneous	1 50	Sketches by Boz—Hard Times	1 50
Christmas Books—Two Cities	1 50	Great Expectations—Italy	1 50
Oliver Twist—Uncommercial	1 50		

Sets of Dickens' Complete Works, in 15 vols.—[elegant half calf bindings].. 50 00

Augusta J. Evans' Novels.

Beulah	$1 75	St. Elmo	$2 00
Macaria	1 75	Vashti	2 00
Ines	1 75	Infelice .....(New)	2 00

Digitized by Google

May Agnes Fleming's Novels.

Guy Earlscourt's Wife.....$1 50
A Terrible Secret.. ..... 1 50
Norine's Revenge 1 50
Silent and True..... 1 50
Heir of Charlton—(New)..... 1 50
A Wonderful Woman..... .....$1 50
A Mad Marriage..... ..... 1 50
One Night's Mystery..... 1 50
Kate Danton. 1 50
Carried by Storm....(New). 1 50

The Game of Whist.

Pole on Whist—The English standard work. With the "Portland Rules."....$1 00

Miriam Coles Harris.

Rutledge $1 50
Frank Warrington 1 50
Louie's Last Term, St. Mary's. 1 50
Richard Vandermarck..... 1 50
The Sutherlands.....$1 50
St. Philips..... 1 50
Round Hearts for Children..... 1 50
A Perfect Adonis—(New)..... 1 50

Mrs. Hill's Cook Book.

Mrs. A. P. Hill's New Southern Cookery Book, and domestic receipts....$2 00

Julie P. Smith's Novels.

Widow Goldsmith's Daughter.$1 50
Chris and Otho..... ..... 1 50
Ten Old Maids 1 50
His Young Wife..... ..... 1 50
The Widower $1 50
The Married Belle... ... . 1 50
Courting and Farming 1 50
Kiss and be Friends—(New).... 1 50

Victor Hugo.

Les Miserables—From the French. The only complete unabridged edition.....$1 50

Captain Mayne Reid.

The Scalp Hunters.....$1 50
The Rifle Rangers. 1 50
The War Trail..... 1 50
The Wood Rangers..... 1 50
The Wild Huntress..... 1 50
The White Chief.... ..... $1 50
The Tiger Hunter..... ..... 1 50
The Hunter's Feast.... ..... 1 50
Wild Life..... 1 50
Osceola, the Seminole... ..... 1 50

Artemus Ward.

Complete Comic Writings—with Biography, Portrait and 50 Illustrations....$1 50

A. S. Roe's Select Stories.

True to the Last..... .....$1 50
The Star and the Cloud..... 1 50
How Could He Help it?..... 1 50
A Long Look Ahead.....$1 50
I've Been Thinking..... 1 50
To Love and to be Loved..... 1 50

Charles Dickens.

Child's History of England—Carleton's New "*School Edition*," Illustrated..$1 25

Hand-Books of Society.

The Habits of Good Society—The nice points of taste and good manners. ..$1 00
The Art of Conversation—for those who wish to be agreeable talkers..... 1 00
The Arts of Writing, Reading, and Speaking—For self-improvement.... .. 1 00
New Diamond Edition—Elegantly bound, 3 volumes in a box..... 3 00

Carleton's Popular Quotations.

Carleton's New Hand-Book—Familiar Quotations, with their authorship.....$1 50

Famous Books—"Carleton's Edition."

Arabian Nights—Illustrations....$1 00
Robinson Crusoe—Griset. do.... 1 00
Don Quixote—Dore Illustrations..$1 00
Swiss Family Robinson. do... 1 00

Josh Billings.

His Complete Writings—With Biography, Steel Portrait, and 100 Illustrations.$2 00
Old Probability—Ten Comic Almanax, 1870 to 1879. Bound in one volume. ... 1 50

Allan Pinkerton.

Model Town and Detectives...$1 50
Strikers, Communists, etc..... 1 50
Criminal Reminiscences, etc.... 1 50
Spiritualists and Detectives....$1 50
Mollie Maguires and Detectives 1 50
The Mississippi Outlaws, etc.. 1 50

Celia E. Gardner's Novels.

Stolen Waters. (In verse).....$1 50
Broken Dreams. (Do.) 1 50
Terrace Roses..... 1 50
A New Novel..... 1 50
Tested.....$1 50
Rich Medway's Two Loves..... 1 50
A Woman's Wiles..... 1 50

Carleton's Popular Readings.

Selected Prose and Poetry—Edited by Mrs. Anna Randall-Diehl..... $1 50

Digitized by Google

"New York Weekly" Series.

Thrown on the World.....$1 50
A Bitter Atonement..... 1 50
Love Works Wonders..... 1 50
Evelyn's Folly..... 1 50
Lady Damer's Secret..... 1 50
Peerless Cathleen..... 1 50
Nick Whiffles.....$1 50
Lady Leonora..... 1 50
The Grinder Papers..... 1 50
Faithful Margaret..... 1 50
Curse of Everleigh..... 1 50

Charles Dickens.

Dickens' Parlor Table Album of Illustrations—with descriptive text.....$2 50

M. M. Pomeroy ("Brick").

Sense. A serious book.....$1 50
Gold Dust. Do 1 50
Our Saturday Nights 1 50
Nonsense. (A comic book).....$1 50
Brick-dust. Do 1 50
Home Harmonies..... 1 50

Magic Mother Goose.

Magic Transformation Pictures—Six books, 25 cents each. Bound in one...$1 50

Violet Fane's Poems.

Constance's Fate; or, Denzil Place. $1 50
From Dawn to Noon.....$1 50

Mrs. E. P. Miller.

Mother Truth's Melodies—A new Children's picture Kindergarten.....$1 00

Ernest Renan's French Works.

The Life of Jesus... Translated.$1 75
Lives of the Apostles Do. 1 75
The Life of St. Paul. Translated.$1 75
The Bible in India—By Jacolliot. 2 00

G. W. Carleton.

Our Artist in Cuba, Peru, Spain, and Algiers—150 Caricatures of travel.....$1 00

Miscellaneous Publications.

Hawk eyes—a comic book by "The Burlington Hawkeye Man." Illustrated...$1 50
Cashier's Scrap-Book—Anecdotes of Banks and Bankers. By H. C. Percy.. 2 00
The Culprit Fay—Joseph Rodman Drake's Poem. With 100 illustrations..... 2 00
Gervaise (L'Assommoir)—Translation from Zola's French novel..... 1 00
Parlor Amusements—Games, Tricks, and Home Amusements, by F. Bellew... 75
Love [L'Amour]—Translation from Michelet's famous French work. 1 50
Woman [La Femme]— Do. Do. Do. 1 50
Verdant Green—A racy English college Story. With 200 comic illustrations.... 1 00
Laus Veneris, and other Poems—By Algernon Charles Swinburne..... 1 50
Birds of a Feather Flock Together—By Edward A. Sothern, the actor.... 1 00
Beatrice Cenci—Translated from the Italian novel, with portrait by Guido. 1 50
The Two Brides—A new novel by Rev. Bernard O'Reilly; Laval..... 1 50
Morning Glories—A charming collection of Children's stories. By Louisa Alcott. 1 00
A Southern Woman's Story—By Mrs. Phœbe Yates Pember..... 75
The Gospels in Poetry—Newly translated by Elijah H. Kimball..... 1 50
Lion Jack—A new illustrated Menagerie book for boys. By P. T. Barnum..... 1 50
Strategems and Conspiracies—Attempts to defraud Life Insurance Companies. 2 00
From New York to San Francisco—By Mrs. Frank Leslie. Illustrated..... 1 50
Why Wife and I Quarreled—Poems by the author "Betsey and I are out.".. 1 00
West India Pickles—A yacht Cruise in the Tropics. By W. P. Talboys..... 1 50
How to Make Money; and how to Keep it—By Thomas A. Davies..... 1 50
Threading My Way—The Autobiography of Robert Dale Owen..... 1 50
Debatable Land between this World and Next—Robert Dale Owen..... 2 00
Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism—By D. D. Home, the Medium..... 2 00
Yachtman's Primer—Instructions for Amateur Sailors. By T. R. Warren. 50
Souvenirs of Travel—By Madame Octavia Walton Le Vert, of Mobile, Ala.... 2 00
The Fall of Man—A Darwinian Satire, by author of "New Gospel of Peace.".. 50
The Chronicles of Gotham—A New York Satire. Do. Do. .. 25
Tales from the Operas—A collection of stories based upon the Opera plots.... 1 50
Progressive Petticoats—A Satirical Tale. By Robert B. Roosevelt..... 1 50
Our Children—Hints for keeping them in Health. By Dr. Gardner..... 1 00
Ladies and Gentlemen's Etiquette Book, of the best Fashionable Society... 1 00
Accomplishments in Conversation, Letter-Writing, and Oratory.... 1 00
Love and Marriage—A book for young people. By Frederick Saunders... 1 00
Under the Rose—A capital book, by the author of "East Lynne."..... ... 1 00
So Dear a Dream—A novel by Miss Grant, author of "The Sun Maid."... .. 1 00

Digitized by Google

Miscellaneous Works.

H. M. S. Pinafore—The Play ....$ 10
Parlor Music Album..... .. 1 50
Comic Primer—Frank Bellew.... 25
He and I—Sarah B. Stebbins..... 50
Annals of a Baby. Do ... 50
Parlor Table Companion..... 1 50
Me—Mrs. Spencer W. Coe 50
Trump Kards—Josh Billings..... 10
Little Guzzy—John Habberton.... 1 00
Lady Huckleberry's Opinions.. 25
Offenbach in America..... 1 50
Rural Architecture—M. Field.... 2 00
Coney Island and the Jews..... 10
Book About Lawyers—Jefferson 1 50
Book About Doctors. Do. 1 50
Glimpses of the Supernatural... 1 50
Widow Spriggins-Widow Bedott. 1 50
Victor Hugo—Autobiography $1 50
Orpheus C. Kerr—4 vols. in one.. 2 00
Fanny Fern Memorials..... 2 00
Parodies—C. H. Webb (John Paul) 1 50
My Vacation. Do. Do. 1 50
Sandwiches—Artemus Ward..... 25
Comic History U. S.-L. Hopkins 1 50
Watchman of the Night..... .. 1 50
Nonsense Rhymes-W. H. Beckett 1 00
Sketches—John H. Kingsbury.... 1 50
Lord Bateman—Cruikshank's Ill.. 25
Northern Ballads-E. L. Anderson 1 00
Beldazzle Bachelor Poems..... 1 00
Wood's Guide to N. Y. City.... 1 00
Only Caprice — Paper covers..... 75
Was it Her Fault. Do. 75
Fashion and Passion. Do. 75

Miscellaneous Novels.

Madame — Frank Lee Benedict $1 50
Hammer and Anvil— Do. Do.. 1 50
Her Friend Lawrence—Do. Do.. 1 50
Sorry Her Lot—Miss Grant..... 1 00
Two of Us—Calista Halsey..... 75
Spell-Bound—Alexandre Dumas.. 75
Wired Love—E. C. Thayer..... 75
Cupid on Crutches—A. B. Wood. 75
Doctor Antonio—G. Ruffini..... 1 50
Ange—Florence Marryatt..... 1 00
Errors—Ruth Carter..... ..... 1 50
Heart's Delight—Mrs. Alderdice. 1 50
Unmistakable Flirtation-L. Garner 75
Wild Oats—Florence Marryatt.... 1 50
True Love Rewarded—A. S. Roe 1 50
Widow Cherry—E. L. Farjeon... 25
Solomon Isaacs— Do. Do. 50
Led Astray—By Octave Feuillet.. 1 50
She Loved Him Madly—Borys... 1 50
Thick and Thin—Mery..... 1 50
So Fair yet False—Chavette... 1 50
A Fatal Passion—C. Bernard ... 1 50
Woman in the Case—B. Turner.. 1 50
Marguerite's Journal—For Girls. 1 50
Milly Darrel—M. E. Braddon.... 1 00
Edith Murray—Joanna Mathews.. 1 00
Doctor Mortimer—Fannie Bean.. 1 50
Outwitted at Last—S. A. Gardner 1 50
Vesta Vane—L. King. R..... 1 50
Louise and I—C. R. Dodge..... 1 50
My Queen—By Sandette..... 1 50
Fallen among Thieves—Rayne.. 1 50
San Miniato—Mrs. Hamilton..... 1 00
Peccavi—Emma Wendler..... 1 50
Conquered—By a New Author.... 1 50
Shiftless Folks—Fannie Smith.... 1 50
Baroness of N. Y.—Joaquin Miller 1 50
One Fair Woman— Do. Do. 1 50
Another Man's Wife—Mrs. Hartt 1 50
Purple and Fine Linen—Fawcett. 1 50
Pauline's Trial—L. D. Courtney.. 1 50
The Forgiving Kiss—M. Loth... 1 75
All For Her—A tale of New York $1 00
All For Him—By All For Her.... 1 00
For Each Other— Do. 1 00
Janet—An English novel. 1 50
Innocents from Abroad..... 1 50
Flirtation—A West Point novel.... 1 00
Loyal unto Death. 1 50
That Awful Boy 50
That Bridget of Ours..... 50
Bitterwood—By M. A. Green..... 1 50
St. Peter's Bride—Mrs. S. Harper 1 50
Fizzlebury's Girl—De Cordova... 50
Eros—A tale of love and soda water. 50
A Woman in Armor—Hartwell... 1 50
Phemie Frost—Ann S. Stephens.. 1 50
Charette—An American novel..... 1 50
Fairfax—John Esten Cooke..... 1 50
Hilt to Hilt. Do..... 1 50
Out of the Foam. Do. 1 50
Hammer and Rapier.Do. 1 50
Warwick—By M. T. Walworth.... 1 75
Lulu. Do..... 1 75
Hotspur. Do.... ..... 1 75
Stormcliff. Do 1 75
Delaplaine. Do..... 1 75
Beverly. Do..... 1 75
Seen and Unseen..... 1 50
Kenneth, My King—S. A. Brock. 1 75
Heart Hungry-M. J. Westmoreland 1 50
Clifford Troupe. Do..... 1 50
Silcott Mill—Maria D. Deslonde.. 1 50
John Marbel. Do..... 1 50
Passing the Portal—Mrs. Victor. 1 50
Out of the Cage—G. W. Owen. . 1 50
Saint Leger—Richard B Kimball. 1 75
Was He Successful? Do. 1 75
Undercurrents of Wall St. Do... 1 75
Romance of Student Life. Do... 1 75
To-Day. Do... 1 75
Life in San Domingo. Do... 1 75
Henry Powers, Banker. Do... 1 75
Manfred—Guerrazzi..... 1 50

Digitized by Google

A Wonderful New Book. Just Published.

CARLETON'S
HOUSEHOLD ENCYCLOPÆDIA
AND
HAND-BOOK OF GENERAL INFORMATION.

A Large, Handsome Volume of 500 *Pages, Clear Type, Beautifully Printed, and PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED.*
Elegantly Bound in Cloth, Presentation Style.

EDITED BY THE ABLEST TALENT THE WORLD AFFORDS.

This is one of the most wonderful books ever published. It is a handy book of reference upon nearly every subject that can possibly be thought of. It contains, in a single volume, what can otherwise be learned only from a great many different works—large and costly encyclopædias, dictionaries, etc.; and, instead of long and diffuse chapters of information, it gives what nearly every one wants to know in a very few lines—in a nut-shell, so to speak. No *single volume* was ever before published that can compare to it.

In reading nearly any book or paper, there are frequent references to a thousand and one matters which the general reader would like to understand a little more about, and which, unless he has a large library of costly books to refer to, he can learn nothing; but here, with this one volume, *CARLETON'S HOUSEHOLD ENCYCLOPÆDIA*, he can turn at once to the INDEX and find the page, and the whole thing is clearly and concisely explained! There has never been any *one book* so immensely valuable for the General Public.

A very important feature of the book is, that, in addition to every subject being carefully indexed by *itself*, so that any one word can be turned to at once, the reader will find everything relating to one general subject is collected together under one general classification. For example:—Mythology is treated of in one place, and everything about it is under one chapter, while, in the COMPLETE INDEX, each individual character and reference is alphabetically found, thus enabling the reader to study the whole of MYTHOLOGY, or to refer at a glance to any one mythological character, and learn all about it in one short paragraph. The same in History, Science, Philosophy, Geography, Art, etc., etc.

TO AGENTS.

No book was ever so easy to sell as this one. As a rule, encyclopædias and works of real valuable information have been the most successful books to sell; but, heretofore, they have been in too many volumes, and too costly, for the general reader; but here, in this

ONE-VOLUME ENCYCLOPÆDIA,

the nail has been hit square on the head, and a book is published in *one volume*, at a low price, within the means of all—a book that every person, man or woman, will seize with avidity, and exclaim, "AT LAST, THIS IS THE VERY BOOK I WANT."

☞ SOLD ONLY BY *OUR AUTHORIZED SUBSCRIPTION AGENTS.*

For Terms, Territory of Sale, and other particulars, address

G. W. CARLETON & CO.,
Publishers, Madison Square, New York

Digitized by Google

CHARLES DICKENS' WORKS.

A New Edition.

Among the many editions of the works of this greatest of English Novelists, there has not been until now *one* that entirely satisfies the public demand.—Without exception, they each have some strong distinctive objection,—either the form and dimensions of the volumes are unhandy—or, the type is small and indistinct—or, the illustrations are unsatisfactory—or, the binding is poor—or, the price is too high.

An entirely new edition is *now*, however, published by G. W. Carleton & Co. of New York, which, it is believed, will, in every respect, completely satisfy the popular demand.—It is known as

"Carleton's New Illustrated Edition."

COMPLETE IN 15 VOLUMES.

The size and form is most convenient for holding,—the type is entirely new, and of a clear and open character that has received the approval of the reading community in other popular works.

The illustrations are by the original artists chosen by Charles Dickens himself—and the paper, printing, and binding are of an attractive and substantial character.

This beautiful new edition is complete in 15 volumes—at the extremely reasonable price of $1.50 per volume, as follows:—

1.—PICKWICK PAPERS AND CATALOGUE.
2.—OLIVER TWIST.—UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER.
3.—DAVID COPPERFIELD.
4.—GREAT EXPECTATIONS.—ITALY AND AMERICA.
5.—DOMBEY AND SON.
6.—BARNABY RUDGE AND EDWIN DROOD.
7.—NICHOLAS NICKLEBY.
8.—CURIOSITY SHOP AND MISCELLANEOUS.
9.—BLEAK HOUSE.
10.—LITTLE DORRIT.
11.—MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT.
12.—OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.
13.—CHRISTMAS BOOKS.—TALE OF TWO CITIES.
14. SKETCHES BY BOZ AND HARD TIMES.
15.—CHILD'S ENGLAND AND MISCELLANEOUS.

The first volume—Pickwick Papers—contains an alphabetical catalogue of all of Charles Dickens' writings, with their positions in the volumes.

This edition is sold by Booksellers, everywhere—and single specimen copies will be forwarded by mail, *postage free*, on receipt of price, $1.50, by

G. W. CARLETON & CO., Publishers,

Madison Square, New York.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google